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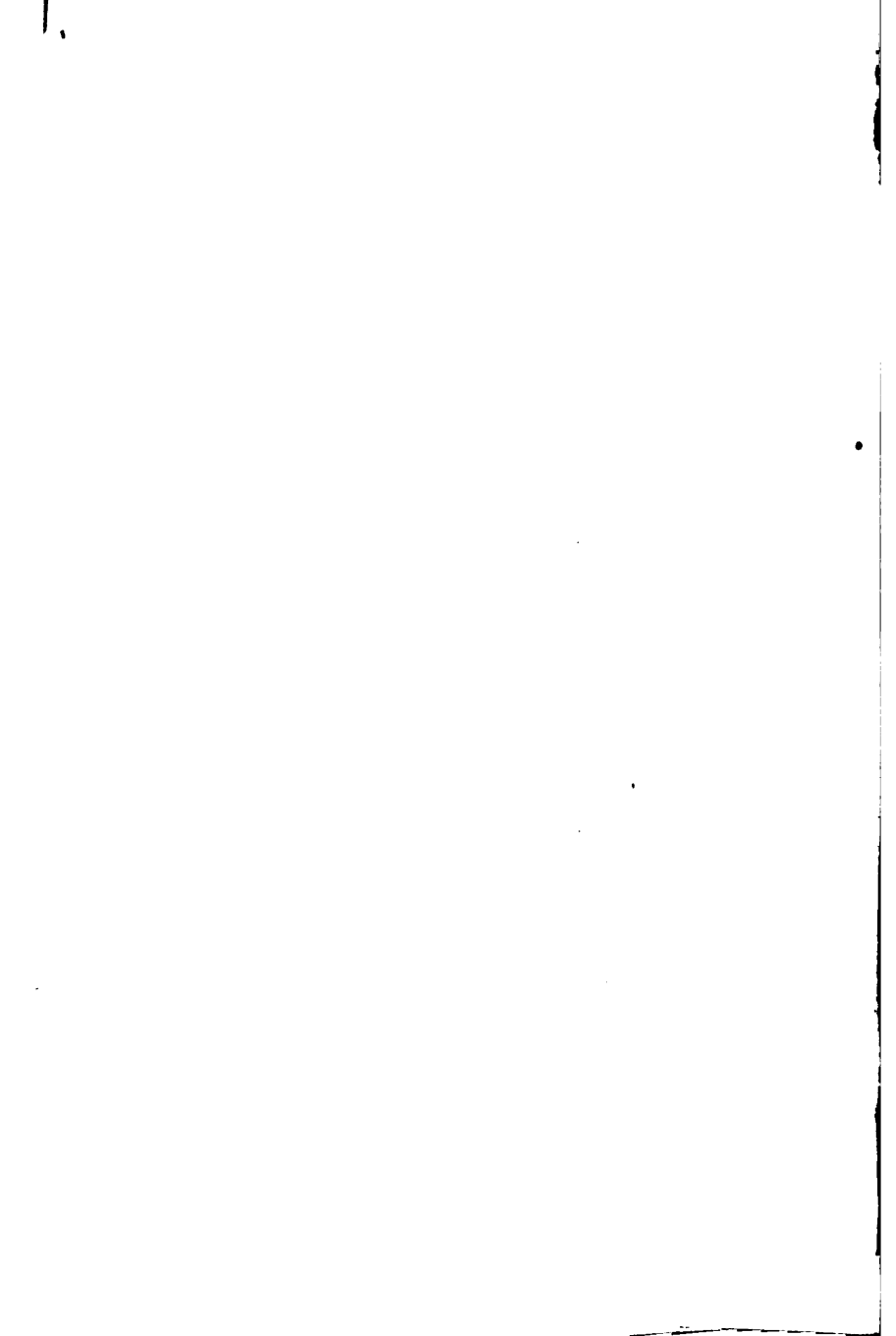


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Alain Tanger's Wife

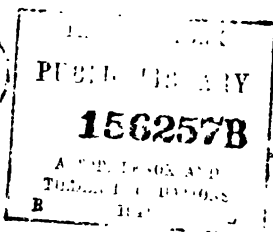
By

J. H. Yoxall

Author of "The Rommany Stone"



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ALAIN TANGER'S WIFE
A ROMANCE OF 1899

THE THRESHOLD OF THE ADVENTURE

I

"Advised, when he came to a strange city, to worship the gods of the place."

FIVE gay cracks of the whip announced the coming of five guests, and the collar-bells jangled cheerily as with "Hep!" and "Eup!" our coachee swung us into the courtyard of the Rusty Lance. Madame herself received us; "M'sieur!" bowed Madame the buxom; I lifted my hat with almost Gallic grace. I was third to step from the voiture but first to be served with a room. For am I not M'sieur the Angliche, at Brivac the rarest of birds?

"But certainly, M'sieur,—a good room, our best,—the Number Seven."

"I thank you, Madame," said I.

"One likes well to give M'sieur the Number Seven," she smiled. "It is our most grand, it is the chamber historic. M'sieur will be charmed! It is a chamber of

a double bed, however, and—M'sieur is sole? M'sieur is not accompanied? By his dame?"

I winced. "No, my faith. No, indeed!"

"Ah, it will matter nothing, that: Patrice, the Number Seven." And Madame turned to attend to her other new-coming guests.

Confound my marriage! It jars me everywhere. "M'sieur milor' is sole?" even Patrice queried, as he led the way upstairs. "M'sieur brings not his dame to the Lance? Ah! M'sieur is sole for the moment, yes!" he grinned, as we passed along an open gallery. "But M'sieur milor' goes to have his dame here by-and-by?"

I winced again, but I carried it off. "Why so, Patrick,—why?" I said. "Why, my exile of Erin?" For the fellow is the most Irish of Frenchmen, frank and rufous and droll, with sun and laughter in his eyes, and a pug-nose freckled. "Why so, my arrah-na-pogue?"

He heaved up his shoulders and spread out his hands, dropping my kit-bag to do it. "The chamber historic, behold! is a chamber of a double bed. And M'sieur is alone." His twinkling brown eyes roved from pillow to pillow. "M'sieur requires not the both?"

"No, no,—but that will matter nothing," I snapped, with a wince again. "Go, Patrick,—bring me for companion a bath-tub, if bath-tub in Brivac there be. And stay!—bring me also of water,—very plenty of water,—all quick!"

He threw up his hands again. "M'sieur is not a pilgrim!" he said, and was gone.

I sighed; I had jested with the man, but his words had rubbed a sore; I sighed as I found myself in that vast bedroom, alone. And then I stared around me; for the chamber historic is not the ordinary French town's best inn's best room. The usual gilt clock stands between

the usual candelabra, upon the usual futile mantel, it is true ; the customary grey milk-jug and sugar-basin perch on a skimpy washstand, and curtains keep air from the bed. But three notable portraits hang on the walls ; the walls are stencilled with a design of mitre, crown, and bâton ; and a parchment prominently displayed tells how a pope, a king, and a world-famous general have slept, by turns of course, in this room.

"Historic indeed, my Jove !" thought I, as I read how, on the twenty-ninth of January, in the year 1814,— "always that year," I said to myself,—Pope Pius the Seventh, with the Cardinals and officers of his household, condescended to descend at the Rusty Lance ; how, on the fifteenth of the March following, King Ferdinand of Spain, also the Seventh, arriving in Brivac, did from the gallery outside my chamber receive with tears the homage of many Spaniards, then prisoners of war in the little town ; and how, on the second of May the same year, "M. le Duc de Vellinton, Generalissimo of all the English armies," had honoured the Rusty Lance.

"So the greatest man came last ?" I turned to say, as a substitute for a bath-tub was dumped down at my heels. "And the third time paid for all, I expect,—my Erin-go-bragh ?"

"M'sieur milor' pleases himself to be facetious," Pat said, with a grin. "Me, I comprehend not the English, but I am not troubled at that. M'sieur and Patrice go to be friends, it is clear.—Tenez, I go to fetch water,—many barrels. Since it *must* be so !" he sighed.

And while I sluiced away the dust of a July day's journey through Central France, I pondered how best to begin the mysterious business that brought me to Brivac,—to Brivac-the-Joyous, delightful old bourg on the rushing Corrèze.

I had come at the dinner-hour, and the bell had ceased its last vibration minutes before I could descend; yet I found the *salle-à-manger* void and its long table bare. But Madame was watching for her English guest. Roses were red and dewy on her comfortable bosom, she radiated, she had a festival air. "By here, M'sieur," she cooed, with a suave feline gleam of her excellent white teeth; and she ushered me into the famous garden of the Rusty Lance.

"To have the fresh air while you eat," she explained. "Behold the garden, M'sieur; before the Revolution it was the garden of the Saint Sang. Behold the Convent yet."

She waved my eyes to the right hand, but all I could see of the convent was a tall wall which rises on the other side of a brook that laves the border of the garden. It is a sombre wall of shaly stone; and beneath it the brook ran grey,—sombre and grey as the lives that are led beyond that wall, I thought, with a shrug.

But the garden itself was gay enough to make amends. Tree, flower-bed, grass-plot, and climber were bathed in light,—light that was neither silvery nor golden, yet both. The *table-d'hôte* was spread within a long high trellised *berceau*, a bower of vine and passion-flower, clematis and *laurier-rose*. The long white cloth was lamp-lit already, and the lamplight filtered up through a fantastic tapestry of leaves to burnish the russet boughs of chestnut that hung over all. Westward, a primrose sky was meshed in purple, and a star, the first white foot-mark of evening, was printed on the east. Flowers shone and lately-sprinkled leaves flashed white in that multicoloured illumination; and within the arbour there were cheery tinklings of glass and the mirthful chatter of folk who feel it good to be alive.

"Charming, charming, Madame!" I said, to her eyes that expected my praise. "Just simply the most delightful inn of all France! And much of the world here, is it not?" For there were forty or fifty guests at table under the trellis.

"Always much of the world at the Lance," she said proudly. "The Lance is famous,—M'sieur will have heard in England of the Lance."

"Parbleu!" said I. "Who has not?"

"And see, M'sieur, what distinguished guests yonder,—Mesdames and Messieurs the pilgrims, for Duramadour to-morrow."

"Pilgrims?" I echoed, staring at the comfortable merry folk of whom she spoke. "Pilgrims? Duramadour?"

"Yes, yes, to the so-famous shrine they go to-morrow. But not all of them," she smiled. "One is not so pious as all that! M'sieur perceives well the Voyagers of Commerce,—they are loud. But behold the Officers of the Military,—always the officers dine at the Lance. And tenez, M'sieur, see yonder our pride, the brave Major Groschaud!"

Groschaud! the man I had come for; the man I was to cajole and seduce. Madame was proudly regarding a figure that held the place of honour at table, and her eyes were shining with the admiration that is akin to love. "Tenez, I shall give M'sieur the pleasure of sitting beside the so-famous soldier of France!" she said.

"The honour, Madame!" I touched a finger to the crackle of the thousand-franc notes that lay within the lining of my waistcoat, the handsel of the secret letter brought for that gallant foe of England, Groschaud. Nothing could have fallen out better, I thought, as Patrick, black-jacketed and white-aproned now, pushed in my chair behind me, and I sat almost rubbing elbows with the man

I had come to Brivac to buy. Nothing could fall out better; but I shall need to handle him gingerly; Flapp the mulatto was very strong on that. I am to be as cautious as a lion-tamer, Flapp said.

So I bowed to the Major, and a very stiff bow indeed was what I got in response. He corrected the angle of his bushy moustachios, frowned his tufty eyebrows, and bent again to his meal. With fingers and a little silvered dagger he was withdrawing baked snails from brown shells that rattled on his plate. I shall have to get him out of his shell himself, some way.

"Quick, Patrice," said Madame, as with a smile she left me. Protectingly Patrick set down at my elbow bottles of red wine and white, neighboured with them a siphon of seltzer and a mist-covered water-carafe, clanked a lump of ice into my glass, cut me a foot-and-a-half of bread, poked a steaming soup-plate down over my shoulder, and then stood at ease to watch M'sieur the Englishman eat.

The twilight was silvering, the lamp-light was goldening, and, before that plenteous first meal of mine at the Rusty Lance was half done, the sky was darkly violet beyond the Convent wall. A paunchy little merchant, dandily dressed, had moved to the chair beside me, and was chattering of England and the English in loud French persistently, no matter how much that foe of England, the Major, might frown.

"Ah yes," said my gossip. "Your England, I know it well,—like my pocket, M'sieur. My pocket knows it too! Two months of the year I do dwell in your fogs,—br-r-r! At the so-grand hotels of Sherring-Croze I descend,—your hotels, they are dear; my faith, one had need be rich. But how, then? You English are such men of grand affairs! Tenez, I sell the porcelain of Limoges.

Ah well, I demand not the money! Ah no,—me, I take the word of an English of grand affairs!” He spread his hands and widened his eyes at the miraculous probity of the English, and my other neighbour scowled to hear.

“Me, I know well the English, I did marry a female English,—my wife and daughter, they speak your language well.”

“And you?” I asked. “Don’t you? I should have thought you would have picked the language up, M’sieur?”

Ah no, he assured me. He avoided to pick it up. He had a good reason for that, oh yes. If he spoke the English, would he not have to talk with the mother of his wife? He gave a guffaw. “Madame the mother of my wife, she speaks not the French!” And again the little dandified tub of a fellow gave his big guffaw. “M’sieur himself is not married, perhaps?” he asked.

I held my tongue, and bit it. My marriage jars me everywhere.

Groschaud had unbent into a grim smile as he listened, and now with a satiric bow he left us at table. And “Vive Groschaud! Vive la France!” called out a patriotic voyageur of commerce with his mouth full, as the Major, the Capitaine-Instructeur, and the Capitaine-Trésorier passed out at the arbourèd gate.

“They go to the Café of the Comedy,” my friend the china-merchant said, awed. “Perhaps M’sieur also will go, with me, to the Café of the Comedy.”

“Very honoured,—charmed!”

So we went from the garden together, and took the placid boulevard that curves where once the ramparts of Brivac frowned. Not a vestige of turret or curtain or moat remains; high-shouldered houses, backing upon umbrageous gardens bowery with oleander, magnolia, lilac, and laburnum, edge the inner curve of that smiling sweep;

and from one of these gardens came the tinkle-tinkle and loud song of the café-chantant indigenous to France.

The porcelain-merchant passed it by, contemptuous. "It is a beuglant," he said; "we shall be better at the Café; at the Café we shall hear the so-charming *Bluette*. Ah, *Bluette*!" He became rapturous. "What eyes! What lips! What loveliness! M'sieur is amateur of dames, no doubt? Me, I adore the sex. *Bluette*! ah, *Bluette*!"

"Is she so *very* charming?"

"Ah, M'sieur shall see! But M'sieur had better not hope anything. She is cold,—ah, how she is cold! *Tenez, M'sieur!*" he took me by the arm, "here is one week that I have wasted in Brivac, because she is cold! It is not to be believed,—I am not so ugly as that!—you will not me credit, but voilà! after a week, nothing,—not that, not *that*!" He snapped from his thumb the tip of his middle finger. "Not that much, M'sieur!" He flicked his thumbnail against his upper teeth. "I am discouraged; I go to leave Brivac,—there are other girls!"

"Remarkable!" said I. "Incredible, indeed! And where is this extraordinary cold young woman to be seen?"

"But yonder, *parbleu*!" He waved his arm. The boulevard had brought us out upon a vast Square, the Grande Place, edged by trees and dotted by two statues islanded in a sea of gravel. To the west the Square is bounded by the theatre and the terrace of the café adjacent. Over the steps to the terrace hangs a lantern, on which the word "Concert" may be read. I topped those steps with my china-merchant, and came upon Groschaud again.

He was sitting at a little table set on the black-and-white lozenges of the terrace floor; he saw me come, and he took up his glass and his gloves, and departed. He passed into the Café, under a placard that announces, "All the

evenings, Mdle. Bluet, the Star of the Champs Elysées, in her creations." He markedly avoided me. "I shall have a difficult job to win him for Flapp," I thought, as I sat at the table he had quitted, alone.

I sat there alone, because my china-merchant had gone inside to the billiard-table; a Frenchman does not put himself out of his way for you very long. "I like the English, but I love the billiard," he had said. "I am strong at the billiard. All the evenings I play. It is for my good health,—what you English call exercise. I play, and I gaze at the cruel Bluet. M'sieur enters not? Ah, M'sieur makes mistake."

But the glamour of the evening held me back. Contentedly I dreamed on that cool terrace, the glare and sound of the Café unheeded behind me. In front the great Square basked in the benediction of the moon. This was not the night for the fanfare or garrison music, the band kiosk stood unlit and empty; but all the same the Brivac people were out and about, merry with movement and chatter, rejoicing in the leisure and pleasure and the velvety air of the night. I sat and watched them idly. "Business to-morrow," I thought. I was content: the beatific ease that comes of calm digestion and idlesse brooded within me. Peace held me, no portent warned me,—the—the surprise sprang swift at my throat!

I was alone, conscious of no care, no indignity, no searing shame; I remembered no difficult mission, no deceiver, no enemy of mine in all the world. The magic of the summer nights of France enthralled me. England, Lois, Goss, Flapp, my own idiocy,—all these seemed a myriad miles and years away.

Dreamily I heard from the flaring saloon behind me a noise of applauding hands and feet. Then the notes of a prelude tinkled out, crystalline, thin; and next I was

listening to a round sweet voice,—the voice of the Star of the Champs Elysées, no doubt. I listened pleasurably.

"Il était aux Bois-Fleuris," her song began. It was good to hear, it was not gross nor stupid :

"Il était aux Bois-Fleuris
Une jeune demoiselle,
Qui restait sourde et rebelle
Aux amoureux, aux maris."

The voice was sweet, the song was not *rosse* nor *canaille*. But I was too content and cosy even to turn and stare through the tall open windows at the singer ; although I had never heard a voice like that at a *café-concert* before.

The notes of the interlude cascaded, and the song went on :

"Mais un beau jour, on raconte
Que, chaussant ses bas,
Elle rêva d'un Vicomte,
D'un Marquis de Carabas."

The song drew to its end, the accompaniment finished with a crash, and "Bis ! Bis ! Brava !" the audience cried.

For encore the singer gave them, in a voice of pathos and almost of tears, "O Richard, O mon Roi, l'univers t'abandonne !" And then, by way of corrective to that ultra-Royalist song, the accompanist splashed into the "Marseillaise," and the rattle of money began. The Major must have dropped a lavish offering—of fifty centimes at the least—into the shell that the singer was carrying round ; for "Vive Groschaud !" I heard, between two strophes of the "Marseillaise," and a voice said, "Thank you, mon officier ! Thank you much !"

"Deuce take the popularity of the fellow !—who shall I

tackle him?" I mused. "I must get a decent reception for Flapp's letter, somehow. He hates the English,—it is a mistake of Flapp's to make an Englishman his envoy,—it will cost me weeks to thaw him by politeness: I had much better handle him bluffly; I must——"

The jingle of coins in the shaken shell recalled my thoughts; Blulette the chanteuse stood beside me, awaiting her ha'penny fee. My hand went to my pocket. "Well sung, Ma'm'selle," I said; and then I lifted my eyes to her face.

The surprise swooped upon me. "Good God!" I cried. My coffee went over, my chair screeched back, the pavement under me seemed to sway with the sickening heave of earthquake.

"Good God!" I cried again, in English; I was staring at her madly. "You—you,—I believe,—yes, you *are* Lois, you are my——"

I did not utter the word, for she stared me down and checked it. Steadily, unflinchingly, invincibly her eyes perused me; out of a face of pallor they shone at me,—not a flicker of recognition, not a tremor of dread: nothing but astonishment under the steady level lids.

"M'sieur is agitated!" She jingled her shell. "M'sieur says? *What* did M'sieur say? I understand not his language." Not the smallest quaver in her speech. . . .

I recognised my error; there was no white-tipped lock in the dusk of her hair. And indeed, what should a rich English or American girl be doing at a café, singing little French songs and begging ha'pence with a shell? I was a fool to think it; yet I was only half-convinced, and I made my apology in English words.

Impassively she listened. "But I comprehend not," she said. "Say, then, a little,—what is it M'sieur says?"

I was silent; she rattled her shell; "M'sieur is slow"

she remarked ; " M'sieur is English, he is rich,—he goes at least to give me a franc ? " She took the coin.

I watched her stupidly as she moved away. There was no nervousness in her gait ; plainly I am to her unknown. " Another mad Englishman ! " was what she must have been thinking when she gave her shoulders that retreating shrug. And yet,—and yet——

" Mad ! I *am* mad about that woman ! " I thought, as I stumbled down the steps to the Square, still trembling at that astounding likeness ; and " Mad, indeed ! " I groaned, as I passed along the courtyard gallery to my room.

II

"No care for the morrow, and no power upon the hour."

THERE was in London, before I left for Brivac, an infernal ass and Johnny of a fellow called Alain Tanger. I knew him well: I was his intimate; I can depict him in his habit as he lived.

He was eight-and-twenty; he had gone through Marlborough and Peterhouse; he was without a profession, and he owned a bare two hundred a year. He was a duffer; did not understand how to save money or make it; hadn't the sense to use the connections formed at school and college; was without anchorage in the past or chart for the future. In short, he was a fool.

He was a lonely fool; his father died sixteen years back, and he was an only child. Up to the hour of her sudden death, the widow his mother had toiled and spared for him as only a woman who is a mother can. She was a miniaturist; her delicate little pictures of patrician children adorn the screens and consoles of mansions and country houses by the hundred. The scholarships which the fellow's lazy talents won him passed him on from school to college, apart from her; and meantime the lonely and love-hungry poor lady flitted from Hall to Manor-house and from West-end Square to Square, the artist of the darlings of the rich, and a guest in their homes for the time. Her fees were not high, but her toil was unending; she left her son better off than his father had

been. She died in a great house near the New Forest, without a good-bye kiss, or any relative at her bedside, poor woman. And when Alain Tanger came into her savings, he knew of no kin of his alive in all the world.

He was the day-dreaming kind of fool ; capable by fits and starts of action, he lacked the steady grip of decision, the pilot of a guiding purpose. He didn't know in the least how to steer towards the Prosperous Isles ; he couldn't even suit his habits to his purse. He threw away every chance. With his sure two hundred a year in stocks he might have devilled at the Bar, or,—he was handy with the pen,—have written leading articles in support of views not his own ; or he might have dropped the scholar and gentleman, and put his capital into trade. The comfortable career of a shopkeeper was open to him, for example ; the way to make money is to sell something,—anything,—anything else than one's brains. "My son, be a bright poker," Douglas Jerrold said in his apologue. "My son, be a tradesman," is what the poor gentlefolk of to-day should advise.

But Alain Tanger did none of these things—not one : he lived on his paltry income in a paltry way, risking and doing nothing. He might have made interest with the great, wise, and eminent whose sons he knew at Marlborough and Cambridge ; have begged a junior clerkship in the House of Commons, or become a family tutor till he could take Orders and marry a wealthy widow. But he was the proud and pragmatistical kind of fool.

What he did was to slip into a shackling kind of intermittent employ, as—how can I define it?—as a superfine sort of foreign courier, a professional travelling companion. The gift of current tongues was his,—he was always a swotter and dab at languages, I remember ; the itch of foreign travel plagued him, and he found himself more

at home on the Continent than in his native island. He felt himself to be almost a Latin, he had somewhat of the French way of looking at life. He could breathe more freely, he said, with lungs and with brain, on the other side the streak of Channel sea. Fog, the drear sky perpetual, the saturate atmosphere of England and the British habit of mind annoyed him; he was never quite himself in his native land. He could never have been the hard-bitten, masterful, individualistic Englishman, had he tried; he lacked the main-chance eye and the comfortable custom of success. And therefore he escaped to the Continent as often and for as long as his couple of hundred a year, spent frugally, would allow.

For years he travelled for pleasure and free breath, until the death, at Avila, of the conductor of an English travelling party made him suddenly their amateur guide. He was stopping in the same hotel, on pension terms; and the sheep left shepherdless turned to him bleatingly for tendance home. It was thus that his connection with the Tourist Agencies fortuitously began.

The Tourist Agencies at Ludgate Circus and Northumberland Avenue came to bethink themselves of Alain Tanger as the very man for what they call their upper-class work; the work of piloting a set of rich Americans, or a moneyed Yorkshire family, to Italy to pick up art for small-talk purpose, for example. Whenever "We must have a gentlemanly man, you know," was what the head of a family said over the counter, the gentlemanly man supplied was Alain Tanger.

"Public School boy, 'Varsity man," the heads of families were assured, over the counter; "travels for pastime, chiefly,—likes travelling with nice people, you see. Man of private means, we understood, and quite the gentleman. But business is business, and—yes, he takes a fee. Just

as a recognition, you know,—you would like that better, of course? Very strict on one point, though, sir,—he only travels on a footing of equality: expects to be treated quite as one of yourselves for the time.” And thus it befell that Alain Tanger, with his bare two hundred a year, came to be known in all the costly polygot hotels of Europe.

At home, if England can be called his home, he was citizen of the small cosmopolis and customer of the cheaper hospices of Soho. There, at Duvert's and Roche's and the Mont Blanc and the Tour Eiffel of Charlotte Street, the foreign colony knew him well. For these queer places are little oases of France and Italy set down in the desert of England, the renegade fellow used to say.

And a life on the courier's wing was quite to the taste of the feckless kind of mooringless fool that Alain Tanger had come to be. By now he had embodied, one after another, most of Rabelais' two hundred varieties of fool, and he was to step into the skins of the rest before long. You had only to see him and listen awhile to discover how little he was English. Art, architecture, archæology, local colour, folk-lore, customs and costumes, dialect, ballads, music, and so forth,—the whole useless gamut,—appealed to him more than the share-list or the cricket-score; and as a courier he could cheaply satisfy their frivolous appeal. I must paint in a darker shadow here: roulette and baccarat appealed to him as well.

I suppose the women of the parties he piloted about Europe and the Levant would call the fellow good-looking. His legs and arms fell into easy poses, he was straight-nosed, his eyes were dark and big, he shaved his chin and not his upper lip. But his shaven chin didn't square well his jaws had too little snap, he never carried his fingers in a fist. I suppose he had what some women call a

way with him ; I know that he was decently amorous,—a squire of beauty under any sky. But I used to think him heartless until, in the second year of his couriership, he fell in love for a fortnight.

The girl was Mary Adela, second daughter of — Esquire, of Mark Lane and — Lodge, West — ; I mention no names, but indicate the middle-class English missy of her type. No sensible courier ever thinks of mingling his affections with his duties, of course : it is unprofessional, to begin with ; it is also highly unwise. But Alain Tanger was a fool. This particular bit of his folly began with a starlit talk at Siena and ended with a kiss at Sorrento. You will perhaps excuse the girl if you remember that the fellow was always being bragged about by her father to other travelling English and Americans as “a Cambridge man, you know,—consider myself lucky to get him,—he wouldn’t do this for everybody, you know,—quite the gentleman : plenty of private means,” and so on, patati et patata.

The folly ended at Sorrento, I say. It ended perforce : the kiss was overheard by the eldest sister, the ugly one ; and if our superfine courier was not paid off at a minute’s notice, it was only because all fees to him had to go through Ludgate Circus or Northumberland Avenue, indirect. At the first word from the respected father of Mary Adela he stuck his proud nose in the air and marched off. He was fool enough to think he had resigned, but dismissed he was none the less.

I haven’t drawn the picture cleverly unless it shows a waste, a failure, a descent. He knew his own declension well. The affair at Sorrento almost sent him under altogether. He smarted with the memory of having acted like a cad ; he raged at his incapacity for the part of Lochinvar ; he could not buck-up against anything, a

strong fierce line for him was impossible. At Sorrento he realised how far he had sunk in the social stratification : he lost his sense of inner dignity, and began to neglect the outward seeming. He did not sharp, or beg, or tope, but he dressed untidily ; and night after night he benumbed and then renewed his contempt for himself with the heady wine that the croupiers pour at the boards of green cloth.

On occasions he had relapses ; ambition stung him at times. He made resolves, he harboured hopes. "A man has his chance up to thirty-five," was his theory ; a man must begin to arrive by that age or never arrive at all. "I've seven or eight years still," he would say, "it isn't all up with me yet." He knew that his powers, if any, were those of a writer. Suddenly, as he set down some new book, the fervour of the pen would seize him, he would dip the nib into the ink of jealousy, so to speak, "*I can do as good stuff as that*," he would say, and then, in fits and spurts of effort, he would write and write. But presently the spurt would flag, the inspiration would clog and cease to run like the ink from the nib ; and then he would loll back, light his seventeenth cigarette, and melancholise.

And yet there was need enough for him to coin pen and paper into guineas. For the Tourist Agencies had heard of the slip at Sorrento, and his business with them began to fall slack. He gambled meanly enough, yet his little capital dwindled ; the times grew hard with him, and the end of it all came menacingly into view. And then he married, like a fool consummate, indeed !

Such was Alain Tanger, at twenty-eight. This is a faithful portrait of him,—too friendly, if it errs at all. I know the fellow well : I am Alain Tanger myself.

III

"I know nothing of it: I am my own ancestor."

AND now let me set down the story of my deuce of a marriage, and the strange errand that took me to Brivac. Mine was no honeymoon journey; Patrice was easily wrong about that. It was Flapp, the French mulatto, who sent me to the Rusty Lance. To cajole and conspire with Groschaud.

Honeymoon journey, indeed!—but let me begin the record where my cheating began, in a lawyer's office at Austin Friars, one day in February last, no longer ago than that.

A letter called me to Austin Friars. Mr. Jefford Goss, solicitor and commissioner for oaths, wrote to enquire if I was author of an article that had appeared in the *Revue de Paris*, over the name of Alain Tanger? If that were my name by right of birth, would I, then, favour Mr. Jefford Goss with an early call, on private and urgent business?

I dropped the letter into my battered breakfast-tray, jumped across my dingy room, and seized my copy of the *Revue*. A most disquieting letter: it meant an action for libel, or something of the kind unpleasant, I made no doubt. I read my precious three-guinea article over and over again. It was a description in passable French of the colony of French folk resident in London: of their almost pathetic search for outdoor pleasures on Sundays; of the

wineshops, groceries, restaurants, tobacco, newspaper, and book shops that exiled Parisians maintain in the heart of London Town. I had written of their evenings at the Café Royal, their hospitals, concerts, balls; of their London journal printed in French, and the queer old compatriot who totters from restaurant to café with his wallet full of yesterday's *Patries* and *Aurores*. But I had inserted no name, I could spot no libel, I found no ground of offence that could justify even a lawyer's initial fee. All the same, I left my meal unfinished, and made post-haste for the spider's web in Austin Friars.

Mr. Jefford Goss does not look the lawyer: he has sea-blue eyes, wears a reefer office jacket, has a mariner's bluff aspect, and sports an extravagant breezy beard. His den is hung with pictures of yachts and harbours, and even in the month of February his cheeks were ruddy with a salty tan. "Kind of sea-lawyer," I jested to myself; and yet withal a gentleman. Known at Cowes and Oban and Trouville, no doubt; perhaps a Royal Yacht Squadron man. Quite a refined type of master-mariner: his certificate as such hangs beside his legal diplomas: not in the least the conventional man of chicane or conveyancing, learned in the law. And yet——

I took the waiting chair that placed my face to the window, and gazed at him expectant.

"A client of mine is in search of a certain Mr. Alain Tanger," he began, putting the tips of his fingers together and scanning me over them as he leaned back in his swivel chair.

"My name is Alain Tanger," I said.

"It is an uncommon name."

I bowed assent.

"My client saw the name in the *Revue de Paris*."

"Yes," I said,—“yes?”

"I wonder whether you are the Mr. Alain Tanger we want?"

"Impossible for me to say," I answered; "at least, so far."

"You were born to the name, Mr. Tanger, no doubt?"

"Certainly I was."

"And of course you know your family history?"

"I'm afraid I don't; my people are all dead, and they were rather reserved about it, I fancy."

"Don't you know *anything* of them?"

"I know my father's name, and my grandfather's."

"Ah! your grandfather. Now what was your grandfather's name, my dear sir?"

"Charles Alain Tanger," I said. "But tell me why you ask?"

He disregarded that. "Charles Alain Tanger," he said, bending over a pile of memoranda that lay on his desk.

"Yes, Charles Alain,—the same."

"Well, what of my grandfather?" I asked uneasily; for there had always been reticence about him.

Still he disregarded my query. "The late Charles Alain Tanger would be born in or about the year——"

He looked at me for an answer, but I gave him none: I did not know the answer.

He fingered his papers again. "About the year 1814, I should say," he answered himself.

"Really," said I,— "I don't in the least know . . . but about that date, perhaps. I go by my father's age, simply."

"Mr. Tanger, do you happen to know *where* your grandfather was born?"

"I seem to recollect that—I somehow have the impression that—that my father's family came from Weymouth, or thereabout."

He fingered the papers anew. "Yes, Weymouth, or

near it," he agreed. "And that is all you know of your descent, Mr. Tanger?"

"Practically all."

"Remarkable, remarkable! Considering how interesting a study genealogy is. . . . A very fine day for the time of year, don't you think, Mr. Tanger?"

"Perhaps it is," I said. "But it hardly matters whether it is or not. You didn't bring me here to talk about the weather. You seem to have some memoranda there; do you mind me seeing them?"

Jefford Goss pursed up his lips, and for the moment looked the lawyer.

"I should be glad to do so, only,—you see, these are my client's papers."

"Exactly," I said, and I rose. "I can employ a solicitor myself. Good-day!" and I made for the door.

Jefford Goss ran round from behind his desk. "Nonsense, nonsense, my dear sir. Sit down again; you don't take me for a swindling sharp of a lawyer, I hope?" He almost pressed me back into the chair. "Great Scott, my dear sir, don't be in a rage and a hurry! I'm much in my client's hands, of course. I can't show the papers without consulting my client first. I don't even know anything like all the business myself. Don't be so peppery, my dear Mr. Tanger,"—he had dropped the lawyer altogether now,—“just wait a bit, and you shall see my client and have the mystery out.”

"When?"

"Oh, to-morrow, I should think. Can hardly arrange it earlier," he said, pawing his beard. "But this much I may tell you to-day, I suppose,—it's a question of succession. My client is either particularly honest or slightly mad—quite a wilful and unaccountable person altogether. Point of fact, it is thought that a certain estate,

at present the property of my client, more rightly belongs to the heir of Charles Alain Tanger, who was born near Weymouth in the year 'Fourteen."

I gave a long respiration of relief. "I feared your business was a lot less pleasant than that," I said. "An estate? What's the rental?"

He laughed. "Mind you, I don't say for certain! I mustn't commit myself so far as to say that you are to come into an estate. By the Lord, no!—it depends on my client entirely."

"But how can that be?" I asked, after a minute of thought. "Either the property belongs to the heir of Charles Alain Tanger or it doesn't. If it belongs to the heir of Charles Alain Tanger, it belongs to me."

"Permit me, permit," he said, resuming the professional manner. "I fear I have said too much; I shall have to put it right by saying more. My instructions are that my client is absolutely and legally owner. But then, legality is not always equity,—I confess it, though a lawyer. However, we can't discuss the matter more just now. You must see my client: I shall have the pleasure of making you known. Let me see, now,—do you mind looking at the *Times* while I go to the telephone?"

Left alone, I sat with the newspaper folded on my knee, too much astonished to do anything but stare at myself, so to speak. I framed a dozen conjectures. What was Fortune about to pour for me from her horn of abundance? A thousand a year,—two thousand? Five thousand, mayhap?... My Jove! I would use it well, I would forsake sack and live cleanly,—I wouldn't stive in my hole at Bloomsbury another week,—I would make a fresh start, snap my fingers at my decadence, show the world what—

"You are free to-morrow evening, I hope?" The solicitor was with me again.

"Oh yes, at any hour," I said, too eagerly.

He smiled. "So is my client, I find. Very well, then, I shall be able to bring you together. Take a bachelor dinner with me, at the Westminster, to-morrow, seven sharp, will you, Mr. Tanger? Till then, Mr. Tanger, good-day, good-day! . . . Oh, by-the-bye, you will have a copy of your father's birth certificate somewhere? . . . Ah, yes, from the probate papers, of course. Well, you might bring it with you to-morrow,—a mere formality, you know, but——" He rang for a clerk. "Quite so, thank you, Mr. Tanger. . . . Oh, Miller, be good enough to show Mr. Tanger out. Good-day, once more,—*good-day!*"

I came out into claustral Austin Friars quite puzzled but delighted. An estate, my Jove!

IV

“Clear dream and solemn vision.”

THE night of that eventful day I saw my wonted vision again, I remember ; and perhaps more vividly than ever before.

I'm a day-dreaming fool, I have said ; but I can also dream o' nights, —nobody better. A dozen times in my life, I should think, a dozen times at least, I had seen a particular circumstantial vision in my sleep ; and the night which followed my interview with Goss brought it me again. It differs from other dreams in this,—that it is rational and coherent, does not drift into incongruities, exaggerate into absurdities, or fray off into ragged ends. It shows itself as clearly as though my eyes were open on a series of pictures cast by an optical lantern on a screen at my bed-foot. And it is always the same.

The night of my visit to Austin Friars I saw the thing for the unlucky thirteenth time ; the same shimmering, evanescent, serial picture as ever. It is this. I must describe it : it bears on my story, I believe.

A boat, an old-fashioned cockboat sort of affair, is setting out upon the moony waters of a bay. Two cloaked gentlemen are passengers ; a pig-tailed, red-capped, petticoated seaman or fisherman fellow rows them ; under the thwart in the bows lies a squat little chest.

The two gentlemen are alert and stealthy ; very cautiously and soundlessly the cockboat glides to a pause under the

stern of an anchored schooner. The boat-hook flashes, but makes no clink as it grips. I see the metal-bound little chest heaved painfully up; it is slid into the vessel through the cabin window; it must be wonderfully heavy, for the three of them have to hoist. Then the two gentlemen climb on deck; the cockboat departs; the windlass works; the anchor comes drippingly up, silvered by the moonbeams; and the schooner sets out to sea.

The darkness of mist receives it, and presently out of the gloom another picture grows; much as a latent image emerges from the photographic plate in a developing-bath. The schooner has made a landfall off another coast. It is night again; a flare is being burnt on shore. A waved lanthorn answers the signal, the schooner steals in.

I seem to be on deck; I stand between the two adventurers. They are not soldiers, not men of the profession of arms, I can tell, although they wear the semi-military garb of their time and caste. They talk and gesticulate; they are painfully excited; they watch and hearken nervously as the schooner creeps in towards a kind of coombe or chine, a cleft half-filled with cots and huts that cower under a square Tower, built high among toothy rocks on the ridge.

The flare dies out, but our green lanthorn is waved until another glows ashore; I see the streaks of light run liquid on the water, like a film of lit oil; the brown reflections waver, the square Tower heightens and looms, we are nearly in,—the haven opens at our bows, and then!—

Out of the westward blackness comes a flash, comes the boom of cannon; and on our deck what agitation! Ah! we are sold! Ah! we are betrayed! Ah! the devils! Ah! we are baffled, we must flee; we can do nothing else, all else is useless. . . . I do not hear, but I seem to *feel*, all this. Gun after gun, as our vessel goes about; gun

after gun. We are hit; our topsail is down! But we go about, we escape, our schooner is received again into the shelter of mist.

And again I see the crescent-curving bay whence we started; the schooner is back at the old mooring; the cockboat creeps up, the chest is lowered, the pig-tailed seaman rows, the cloaked adventurers reach the quay.

The two gentlemen sit at table in a 'longshore inn; they drink and they quarrel. I seem to *feel* that their wrangle begins about the heavy little chest under the table. Swords are out, the blades grind together, flash, interwine. . . . Ah! a foul blow that! the man is wounded and down!

I see the other take a candlestick and hold it low. The light reveals his own face clearly. I recognise his face: it is the face of Alain Charles Tanger, my father.

That is the recurrent dream which visits my bed. I cannot put a key to it; I can't in the least explain my father's image there. *He* was no smuggler, no adventurer nor ruffler; he never carried a sword nor wore a skirted waistcoat, except on some amateur stage, maybe, or at some masking ball. My father was a placid, silent, mid-Victorian poor gentleman. And yet——

The vision itself is strange; its identical recurrence is stranger; strangest of all is this,—*my father must have had the same repeated dream himself!*

Among my mother's papers, as I found them under lock and key after her death, I came upon a water-colour of the crescent bay, the laden cockboat, the waiting schooner, the two adventurers; and the face of the stabber is the very likeness of my father, the very transcript of the miniature of him that my mother left for me. That water-colour came from my mother's hand; she must have sketched the dream-scene by my father's description of it; he must have seen it again and again in his sleep, as do I,—his son.

Now I am not the superstitious variety of fool,—at least' so far ; the top of my head is too square for that, I suppose ; but all the same, this dream-stuff seems to me to be more than merely coincidental. For why should my mother have kept silence about my father and *his* father so much, unless there were some family blot to hide ?

May not some reflex memory of the deeds of a man's forbears live again in him, a vague, transmitted heritage ? A feature, a trick of habit, a tic, a family whim, may reproduce itself unto the third and fourth generations ; and blood-guiltiness,—may it not leave in a man's progeny as deep a memorised trace ?

My dream *must* be hereditary. My father must have had it too. He loathed the smell of over-ripe cheese, he perspired and grew faint if the rotten filthiness were eaten near him ; so do I. I have that queer recurrent dream,—so must have had my father.

He was a sad and silent man, my mother told me ; I remember him as that myself. He may have known the meaning of that persistent vision : he must have spoken of it to my mother, for she drew the picture of the least terrible part of it so well. She may have had the key to this hereditary secret ; perhaps she would have disclosed it at the last if I, her only son, her one child,—absent, neglectful, airing my graces at Cambridge, callous,—had been with her when she died.

I had my warning ; but I was an ass all through. I dreamed that dream again the night before I saw the lawyer's client ; I have never dreamed it since, these months past. And I wonder now,—I wonder it every day of my life,—I wonder whether this persistent visitation of my sleep contains the clue to the damnable conduct of Lois Amaury Tanger ?

V

“May on the cheek, but January at heart.”

THERE was no third cover set on the gleaming round table in the snug room at the Westminster when I entered it, five minutes before the hour. Jefford Goss noted my glance, for “We shall see my client later on,” he smiled. “Glad to have you, Mr. Tanger. Daresay you’ve brought that birth-certificate with you, by-the-bye?”

“Yes, yes,” he went on as he examined the paper. “‘Alain Charles, son of Charles Alain Tanger, born at Kennington, May 11, 1845.’ *That’s* all right. Now, I shall want your own legal proof of existence,—mere formality, of course: any day will do for that. Except, however,—there is just one point of fact left,—had you any uncles, do you know?”

“My father was an only son.”

“Quite so,—quite. And now,—I ask your pardon,—now we’ll give our minds to Adolphe’s cookery. I rather brag of my bachelor dinners, do you know?”

“With reason, I am sure,” I said, as I regarded him. In his rather fastidious evening dress this yachting solicitor looks neither lawyer nor mariner. He seems what he normally is,—a man of pleasure, twenty years and more about Town, a celibate cognisant of queer corners, a Savage, a Play-goer, and a Knight Harbinger, at home alike in fashionable Squares and “the beautiful city of Prague.” A man with a deal of outside confidence and pose of manner, yet nervous under it all.

"Oh, yes, I'm a confirmed yachtsman," he said as the fish came on, appropriately. "I'm even known a little in the ports across the water. I call my boat a French name, the *Pirogue*. She's pretty successful."

"Sails?" said I.

"Oh, of course; I'm none of your tea-kettle yachtsmen. Try this wine, won't you? By the way, I fancy my client's a fair hand at a yacht."

"Ah, is he French or American?"

"Why either, do you suppose?"

"You talked about ports across the water."

Goss has an irritatingly indulgent smile. "I have never heard my client speak French," he said. "Nor show the least touch of American accent either."

"English, then?" said I.

"Must be," said he. "And now, my dear sir, let go the pump-handle. Put your mind on this dish; it is one of Adolphe's triumphs. We shall see my client and hear all about it by-and-by."

"I've got a box at the Gaiety," he went on. "You'll think my whole way of doing business a bit theatrical, maybe; but, fact is, I never was born to be a limb of the law. I hate it."

"So do most people."

"I earn my bread, but I like to eat it in sandwiches."

"I understand."

"A morning at the office, a couple of hours over lunch at the Constitutional, a client or two after that, perhaps; then a skilful little dinner, a glass or two of fine wine, a cup of un-English coffee, and a couple of hours at a lively play. I suppose you won't mind my way of doing business? It must be second nature to a man of your family."

"Unfortunately, no," I said. "But what *is* my family?"

"Nay, nay," he smiled; "the professional seal of secrecy, you know. And I am afraid I don't even know it myself. My client keeps me much in the dark. I'm only an intermediary: I bring you together. But come, I say again, put all that aside; let us wait, Mr. Tanger,—let us wait."

So I waited. I waited till the curtain went up and the play began; and then,—so unpractical, so dreamish a fellow am I,—I forgot that I was waiting, forgot for what I was waiting. I can always lose myself in even a merely passable play.

I lose myself; and the fall of the act-drop, the wail of the violins, awake me dolorously. It *is* a wail, that musty string music,—be it waltz tune, or Donizetti, or the newest pot-pourri, it is still a wail. To me it strikes a contrast; it comes at the close of the scenic like the cry of the sad real, the moan of the melancholy actualities of life; up from the bottom of the well of the theatre it wails like Truth,—a cry through the mirage of golden mist that always looms within a theatre at night.

The second act had begun; I had forgotten to wonder why no client entered our box; and it came as a surprise when Goss leaned forward a little, stared across the theatre, and whispered, "There,—opposite!"

"Don't seem to do it, of course," he went on; "but look at the opposite box, same tier. . . . A very beautiful girl, don't you think?"

"'Beautiful exceedingly,'" I quoted. "But somewhat icy, I should say." Indeed, a cold and proud and almost defiant isolation seemed the note of her being; it might have been the Royal box that enshrined her. She had lifted her glasses, and I felt uneasy under her haughty gaze.

"Stare back," suggested Goss. I picked up his own double-barrel and returned the fire.

Her eyes were hidden,—what hatred must have been in them, had I seen!—but the curve and flush of her cheek, the press of her lips, the haughty poise of the trim head on its white tower of neck,—pride, pride! they spoke of pride incarnate. Her plenteous hair—— But what was that?—Was that an aigrette shining whitely, just above the high, pale brow?

I scanned that touch of silver curiously. It was a pied lock that seemed to flicker into a little flame of snow; a sign of singularity, a mark of race: *my father had it too. . . .*

I set the glasses down and leaned towards the stage. "That is your client," I said, not seeming to speak.

"How did you guess?"

"That lock of hair,—it is like my father's. . . . Here, let's get out of this,—I want to say something unpleasant."

"You've played with me," I told him testily, when we stood in the corridor behind our box. "You let me think your client was a man." The thing I hate most of all, at any time, is being deceived. I was wild with Goss for deceiving.

"Do you regret the change?" he smiled.

"Not the point,—not the point," I snapped. "Who is she? Tell me at once,—I won't be fooled any longer."

"Gently, gently, my dear sir. I'm your friend in all this, if you'll let me; but it's deuced peculiar business. The act's nearly over. Go in again, and study your lovely cousin."

"My cousin! My cousin, is she? . . . I didn't know I'd got one. *What* cousin? Who is she, man—why don't you say?"

"Nay, nay," he smiled. "She wanted to know the look of you first. . . . Go in again, while I step round to her box."

"Why shouldn't I step round too?"

"I must see if she'll consent to receive you."

"Consent! To receive me!" I was hot with the pride of the poor.

"Great Scott, man! don't bristle up like that! You don't know her,—she's proud the very deuce! Go in again,—go in!"

He almost shouldered me into the box; I believe he turned the key, though I didn't hear it. I heard nothing, not even the play; I was watching my new-found cousin.

She had drawn her cloak around her; it sat upon her martially; the flashing buckle of it seemed the boss of an Amazon's cuirass. She lifted her glasses at me with the gesture of a general who scans the foe. For a full minute I stood her stare unflinchingly; then her lorgnette sank, and I saw her in profile as she turned to the stage.

It was the profile of a war-maiden,—militant, keen, fearless. The lips unsundered, the eye dilate, the eyelid level and still, the head held loftily, the stately breast upsurging proud, she seemed the very type of self-sufficing maidenhood, haughtily her own, icily virginal, disdainful of her sex's clinging lives.

"My cousin, is she?" I muttered to myself. "There'll be little love lost between us, anyhow. That's a girl who could never warm to anybody. She has never known what it is to love. Maybe she never will. And yet——"

The wail of strings and sob of reeds had begun again below; and—it was strange, but the music drifted up to me with new and unwonted burden. The strain was hackneyed; but it sang to me magically: it sang of mystery hidden in the real, of romance still throbbing in the actual, of "something rich and strange" lurking beneath the dull sea of my life. The music caught me and absorbed me. I heard the chatter of the audience basso it; feet trod

the corridor behind me ; to my ear came the scratch of a match, loud jests, a vacuous laugh ; but these disturbed me not. I was dreamer again, I was rapt,—wrapt from the present, enchanted from the real. String and reed wove enchantments : I seemed to be floating on the slow full stream of sound. . . . What was the chime of words the melody fashioned in my head ?

“ Ring low, O sing low, O sing so the song, O !
Long ago, a song ago, I heard the harp of Ariel.”

Yonder across the golden mist my fate was forging, but I could not think upon that. I saw the faded lady who companioned the girl of the strange white lock draw back her chair retiringly ; I watched Goss enter, bow, converse ; I saw the proud head turn to him, the words pearl from her unsmiling lips ; but I could not speculate upon what might be a-saying. Dreamily, with glazed eyes and filming mental perception, I waited motionless, careless, half-stupefied ; my count of time and note of things all lost. . . .

Then the very tissue of my dream, the warp and woof of the music, seemed to shred away, filament by filament, into silence. Lovers were on the stage once more, the play was moving towards its climax ; and presently Goss was with me again. I had not noted him come.

He touched my arm. “ Are you asleep ? ” he said. “ Your cousin wishes us to meet her in the lobby. She is leaving ; she detests the play. Wake up, man ; wake up and come along ! ”

He pulled at my arm, and presently I found myself in a place of lavish plush and gilding and lamps that were mirrored on every hand. “ They haven’t come yet,” Goss said, nervously fingering his beard. Down the stairway I caught a blurred glimpse and softened gust of the roaring

strand, that none the less seemed telescopically distant ; behind a clapping door, that stared at me with its one glass eye, the pop of a champagne cork sounded a thousand miles away. I nodded as I stood there, and swayed.

"Great Scott, man ! wake up !" Goss spoke almost angrily, and rousing from the mists of dream I found myself back in the gaudy, gaslit world : glamour had vanished, the harp of Ariel thrilled no more.

"And yet, here comes Miranda !" was my first conscious thought. The strange white lock was hidden under a nun-like hood, but I knew the proud brows and daunting eyes of her. "Miranda, daughter of Prospero,—virgin Princess ! She has never loved, she never will !" I was thinking as, confused, I bowed.

"Your cousin, Mr. Alain Tanger," Goss said.

Tense, taut like a strung bow, she faced me ; she shot an arrowy glance of disfavour at me, for a moment she stared me down. Then she gave me the brief touch of her cool hand.

"You will lunch with me to-morrow, Cousin Alain." It was a command : she so said it. "Mr. Goss will explain. . . . Mrs. Kyrle,"—she turned to her duenna,— "this is my cousin."

And then she was gone : into a broader glimpse and noisier gust of the Strand she had passed unsquired. I had let her go to her coupé alone.

I was wide awake at that. "Ass ! ass !" I raged at myself.

Goss had an odd smile while he heard me. He lit a cigarette before he spoke. Then, "Don't you worry your soul about that, man ! Your cousin's very independent,—she goes her own way,—alone !"

VI

"Whistle and she'll come to you, my lad!"

"THE Constitutional!" Goss ordered, through the roof of our hansom; and then, "Nonsense, man," for I had demurred. "Nonsense; I must have a say with you before to-morrow: come and have it over a bone."

"Say your say now," I persisted. "Say it while you drive round by my hang-out," and I pushed up the hansom-lid to order the route.

"You're a wilful man," said Goss. "Almost as wilful as my client, by gad! But have your own way,—while you can."

"What may you happen to mean by *that*?" I demanded.

"You've woke up cross," he said. "What did I mean? Oh, Lord, nothing. . . . What a beastly night! Do you know, I think the winters in Lon——"

But I interrupted him. "Oh, hang your talk about weather. Explain! She said you'd explain. What's it all mean?"

He puffed at his cigarette. "It's,—it's rather a delicate thing to explain," he began. "Don't pitch me over the apron if you cut up rough—I'm only the solicitor for the offer, mind you."

"Offer? what offer?"

"Your cousin's offer. What do you think of my client, now you've met? Beautiful, hey? And nicely well off, I imagine. Charming, hey?"

"Yes, yes, of course,—but what then? . . . Oh, talk, talk, confound you! What then?"

"The 'what then' is the delicate part of it," he said, doubtfully. "I told you she says you're the rightful owner of an estate."

"Yes, yes," I said. . . . "Go on, man!" For he had paused again in the most irritating way.

"Look here, Tanger, don't hustle the business; it's deuced difficult; I'm simply astounded at my instructions," he began again, hesitatingly, his hand at his beard, and I schooled myself into patience during another pause. We were pounding past the Griffin and swerving into Chancery Lane, on the way to my den in the Foundling quarter of Bloomsbury. A chain of flitting hansoms brightened the gloom of the Lane a little; the lamp-gleams dazzled on the wet asphalt, red and green; the hoofs clacked on it like castanets. "Well, what is it?" I snapped at last.

"Remember this," he warned: "you're not to appear to know about it, to-morrow."

"For God's sake, out with it, man! Don't you see I'm on thorns? I'll bear it, whatever it is,—don't fear!"

He laughed long and loud. "By the Lord," he said, "it's nothing so terrible, Tanger! Hardly a man in London who wouldn't jump at it, by gad! I own it's astonishing, but,—What do you say to marrying your cousin?"

The message was out at last with a blurt.

Back I leaned in my corner, knocked over with surprise. "My Jove!" I muttered. "*My Jove!*"

He twisted his head to look at me in the light of the match he was using. I glared at him suspiciously, and he laughed.

"Yes; that's it; a wedding, if you like. And a

settlement on you of a cool two thousand a year. Two thou' a year, and about the handsomest wife in London. Nothing very terrible, after all!"

"But,—but *why*?" I stuttered. "Why should she,—a duffer like me?"

With eye and hand he deprecated my self-depreciation. "Perhaps she likes the look of you," he said. "Bless my life, man, the girl's no fool,—you'll not be taking her in. She's unaccountable, of course; but then,—you see, she's got a motive; she can't part with the property altogether,—simply *won't*, she says; so there's nothing for it but to share it through a wedding-ring. Gad, my dear chap, I'm a bachelor born, but I almost wish myself you. Two thou' a year pocket-money, and that girl for wife!"

I pushed up the hansom-lid. "Here, stop!" I said. "I'll get out. . . . You oughtn't to be at large, Mr. Jefford Goss. You're amiable, and maybe harmless, but you're mad!"

He laughed as he held down the flaps. "All right, cabby, drive on," he countermanded. "Mad, am I?" he said to me. "It's you're the lunatic. To jib at a wife like that,—and the property too!"

I leaned back in my corner again. "What property is it?" I gasped.

"Ah! she keeps that a secret, you see. I can't tell you. Practically all I know is that she'll marry you, if you ask her prettily to-morrow."

"Ask her!—to-morrow!" My cigar went spinning out of the cab. "But it's incredible, man!" I cried. "Allow, now, that it's incredible! Good heavens! does she know the useless duffer I am? An idle, shuffling failure, with a hundred and seventy a year to my back! . . . What's her motive? Why should she ever *dream* of it? . . . You're mad or she is, my dear sir."

"Your cousin," he said, speaking slowly and professionally, "is about the ablest woman of affairs I've met. Never saw such decision and despatch. Never mind her motive,—I agree it's a puzzle. She's a puzzle altogether. But I don't know why she shouldn't. After all, your birth's as good as hers, on her own showing. You're public school and Cambridge, decent style and all that,—'pon my soul, I don't know why she shouldn't."

"I don't know why she should."

"You can't explain the whims of a woman. I imagine your cousin is very whimsy indeed. At any rate, there the offer is,—take or leave it; ask her and she'll marry you. That's the sad news she asked me to break," he grinned.

"But it's unbelievable," I muttered. "It's unbelievable," I repeated, two minutes later; I had been trying to believe it meanwhile. "I don't even know she *is* my cousin. What's her name?"

"He demands the name of his bride!" cried Goss in burlesque. "Her name, it is Lois Amaury Tanger, spinster! And that's about all I know. Ask her *how* she's your cousin, to-morrow. Remember, Hotel Bristol, one-thirty. I shan't be there,—not invited. But mind you go; go, my dear fellow; go in and win!" and he laughed his good-night as he dropped me at Evelyn Terrace.

I stood on the cracked doorstep of my dingy lodging, and watched the red back-lights of his hansom lessen away towards Russell Square; I fumbled my key into the worn latch-hole of the paint-blistered door, creaked along the narrow hall upon oilcloth worn patternless by many a boot down at heel; and in the semi-obscurity cast from a smelly benzoline lamp stuck on a sixpenny bracket I mounted to the darkness of my room.

"Two thousand a year!" I thought, by way of contrast, as I struck a light. My eye rested on a certain horizontal expanse. "And a beautiful proud wife into the bargain!"

Cupidity first and Cupid second,— these reflections give the measure of what Alain Tanger had come to be. "A deuced fine offer, anyhow!" I declared to myself as I drained my night-cap glass. I got to bed, and lay awake for hours. And when I slept it was without a dreaming thought of Mary Adela, — of — Lodge, poor girl!

I awoke in the dumps and the doldrums; I had my warning again; I know what such a waking for me portends. The common belief that to sing before breakfast spells sorrow is, in my experience, false. I awoke in anything but a mood for singing, but I went to my interview with Lois Amaury Tanger as determinedly as though I had wakened light of heart. I was become the mercenary kind of fool.

VII

"Hide, oh, hide those hills of snow
Which thy frozen bosom bears."

"YOU may call me Lois, Cousin Alain," she told me, almost at the beginning of luncheon,—long before the coffee came in and Mrs. Kyrle went out. She cousined and cozened me from the first, and Mrs. Kyrle seemed to abet her. I shall best describe the ash-coloured, pale, painfully-genteel Mrs. Kyrle as her gentlewoman of the bed-chamber,—the sort of serving-lady who may wait upon princesses without derogation of personal rank.

And, indeed, my cousin bore herself like a duchess at the very least: independence, refusal to account, high manners, cold pride, passionless detachment from things of the heart, are the characteristics of Lois Amaury Tanger. She seemed a girl to recoil from the mere thought of marriage, as desecration of her chastity of honour and invasion of her independence. And yet this imperious and imperial cousin of mine stooped to me, almost wooed me, hating me for it as she must have done all the while!

What could have been her object? What was the overweening motive that drove her on? She must have hated me all through, though why I cannot guess. So hating me, why should she seek me out? Why plan to marry me? Why buy me with two thousand a year? The motive,—her motive?—that is what I ask myself ceaselessly. If by taking thought I could solve that puzzle, the clue would long ago have been mine. And

yet,—why seek for a rational motive, where a girl so strange is concerned ?

She played her part immaculately ; she did not over-act. A woman of affairs, Goss called her ; business tinged with cousinly feeling,—that was her rôle. And yet, when I reflect on our brief wooing, my memory gathers little hints, at the time half-regarded, and focuses them into the portrait of a girl quite different from what she acted to be. There could be mirth in her, I am almost sure, yet she was never merry. Pity and ruth could possess her,—Mrs. Kyrle bore witness to that,—yet she showed no compassion on me. “Inconsequential” Mrs. Kyrle called her ; a kind of calm hysteria, showing itself in repugnance and pride, sums up the portrait drawn by Mrs. Kyrle.

The pale mute gentlewoman of the bed-chamber carried her coffee-cup off to another room, without murmuring the least pretext for leaving us together alone, and I almost blushed at the obviousness of her part departure. But no embarrassment was shown by Cousin Lois ; the straight imperious lines of her brows and eyelids fronted me unabashed.

I am never sure of the tint of her eyes ; they always daunted my regard. My interviews with her were few and brief ; they have left on my mental retina an impressionist sketch of her only ; most of the details glimmer vague. The white-tipped lock shows clearest, of course ; it lay on the rich umber of her plenteous hair like a tuft of cotton-rush that blows upon peaty moors. That touch of singularity made her unmistakable. Blurette, the singer, lacks it ; though otherwise she might pass for the twin-sister of Lois. For the rest, an impressionist memory only,—coldness, purity, self-adequacy, excitable devotion to some ideal, the energy of one sex vibrant in the grace of the other,—that is my sketch of Lois.

We were alone together, and she met my look with the frankness of one who has never learnt to lower her gaze before the eyes of man; yet she knew that Goss must have told me that I was to be with her to woo, that I knew her to be giving me the chance to woo, that I was aware I had but to ask and have.

Ah, the impenetrable mystery of the girl! An actress born, a Rachel, a Sara! for certes, she is not brazen and maculate: virginity incarnate, Lois,—the very maid of maidens still, confound her! Better for me had she been a Blulette.

We were alone, I say, in her sitting-room at the Bristol, and "Now we can talk of our family tree," she smiled. She had had her agents,—“my agents,” that was her proud phrase,—searching for Alain Tanger for months past, she deigned to inform me; but it was she herself who had traced me at last, through the *Revue*.

“I bless the *Revue*,” said I, by way of a tender opening; it was an opening too tender, for her eyebrows seemed to clash together for a second, though she did not change her tone.

“My solicitor has explained matters, I think, as to what I wish,—concerning a certain family arrangement,” she said, with the air of a Bess or a Wilhelmina regnant inviting a consort to the steps of the throne.

“Mr. Goss mentioned a family property,—yes,” I stammered. “I mean, that is,—he—he tells me you wish to—to divest yourself of some property——”

“Then he has not understood. I do not propose to divest myself of it at all.”

“To share it, then?” I ventured; and now came her swift blush, a dark carnation of face, ears, neck; I felt a peevish pleasure in seeing her redden. But the blush burned there for a minute only, the flame of it passed into

her eyes, left her face pale, and fired her glance with a flash of anger.

"To share it, yes. . . . There is no other way," she frowned. "I must not yield the property to you, I owe a high duty in it, I *cannot* give it up."

"I would not have you do so, Cousin Lois," I said, in what I meant for a lover-like manner. I could kick myself as I recall that manner now; writing in cold blood about it, I begin to think I almost deserved the treatment she gave.

Angrily she looked at me again. Then, "But I cannot discharge the duty attached to it so long as it is rightfully yours alone."

"*I cannot discharge the duty attached to it so long as it is rightfully yours alone.*" I repeat her words to myself daily, and puzzle myself over them without end. They are cryptic, they enclose the key to the enigma, I am sure. But an enigma it remains.

"I am quite in the dark, remember, Cousin Lois. I don't in the least know what you mean by 'it,'" I fished at the time. But I fished in vain; she did not then explain, she never explained, I am in the dark as much as ever to-day.

Yet she talked a good deal, in what I took to be an explaining way. She said that I was descended by one line from our common ancestry, and she by another; that the two lines began to diverge more than a century back; that her ancestor then and my ancestor then were own brothers; that my ancestor was the elder, but the property—the "it"—had passed to hers. That was her explanation: as Patrick says, "it is not any more difficult than that!"

"You bring me a surprise, Cousin Lois," said I. "Two surprises! I didn't know I had a cousin in the world, and I thought my family tree began to sprout at Weymouth."

"Absurd!" she said. "It is astonishing how little you seem to care for such things here," and in those words she gave me the idea that she is American. An American girl's independence, intolerance of rule, and brainy excitability certainly were hers.

"And when you found this out——" I began.

"What out?" she said, curtly. I think for the moment she feared I had discovered her secret.

"That the property didn't belong——"

"It was a shock," she replied, in a quick, relieved way. "It spoiled my life for the time. It disabled me from a duty that had kept me happy and proud."

"I don't understand," said I.

"I was using it for a high purpose, a sacred task," she said, gloomily.

"And then?"

"And then I found that I could not,—it was not mine to use."

"It would be a shock, of course."

She had a face of cloud for a moment. "It—it stung me like an affront!" she said. "I had built on it so much. You can't imagine half it meant to me!"

"To find that 'it' was really mine?"

She was trembling,—for the moment she could not speak.

"And now you think me very unworthy of it?" I went on calmly.

"I think you take it very stolidly," she frowned.

"Although I gain a beautiful cousin by it."

"I,—I am nothing."

"You are advantage enough for the proudest to gain, Cousin Lois."

She drew in her petals. "We will not talk of my part in it, if you please."

"I will talk of whatever you wish."

"The discovery and the consequence are the only things worth talking of," she said, and paused again.

"Yes?" I queried. "Yes?"

"What would *you* have done, if you had made such a discovery?" She flashed the question at me suddenly.

"I,—I——" I dropped my eyes. "I fear I should have done just nothing at all;" and I saw disdain return to her lip. I hastened to mend my error. "I,—I don't know, of course. I have the relics of a conscience. But you, cousin, when you knew, you sought to find me, so that you might rob yourself for my behalf?"

"Oh, not to rob myself," she muttered, dropping her eyes; and there was silence between us for a spell.

"It would be robbing yourself to give me the property you believed your own."

Still silence, still her downcast look. At that moment she was almost all womanly. If I had used the moment, if I had shown myself manly, perhaps——

She may have had a lonesome life, may have been hungering for a little love; had I rightly used that golden instant, all might have been bells and pomegranates thenceforth. But the cue that Goss had given me prevented that; I knew that I was to ask and have; and descended to us from days primeval, when squaws were chased and clubbed into conjugation, persists the prejudice that a facile woman ought not to be loved. I did not permit myself to fall in love; I began to *make* love, mercenarily, odiously, no doubt.

"Lois, Cousin Lois, I will not take 'it' from you," I vowed, with imitation tenderness. "You must keep it, Lois,—keep it and use it for your own."

She shivered at the feigned devotion of my tone.

"Forget that I had any right to it," I went on. "It

is yours, Lois,—I give it back to you. Keep it and use it."

She flamed at that. "I can't, I *can't*!" she cried. . . . "I am a woman,—only a woman! It is for somebody like you,—for a *man*!" There was anger, sex-anger, in her contempt.

Sex-anger rose in me; it was not cupidity alone that stirred me now, but something more abominable. The spectacle of her beauty, pale with hurt pride and shuddering at the ordeal, inflamed me odiously. I felt her manner to me an insult to all men, to manhood, to the male, the master, the appointed subduer of her sex. Some savage attribute awoke in me, an atavic masculine zest of subjugation, a rage of desire to quell her insolent cold maidenhood. A man of wood or tattoo would have clubbed her into submissive wifehood; I modernised the process,—I spoke the words that were to chain her to my tent.

"Share it with me, then. . . . That seems the only way Marry me, Cousin, and let the two lines rejoin!"

She drew a long hesitant breath. What was the puissant motive that forced her on? For her face was anguished; I could see the cost it was to her, I hate to remember that I did not release her, spoke no generous word, silently attended her reply. It is no excuse to urge that the atavic zest was mad in me just then, that here was a beautiful proud girl to be clubbed into connubiation and her portion of beads and beeves to be seized.

She must have read the impulse in me. That was my moment of trial; I spoiled its chance, my eyes must have been hot and amorous and hateful eyes.

Disdain and hatred were in her own before they fell; bitterness was in them when she lifted them again. . . .

"I give you my hand," she said. . . .

Her motive,—*her motive?*—I demand? I leaned towards her, with some shabby feint of love; I suppose my arms went out, my lips hung hawk-like. . . . But she drew away; she pressed a bell; its sharp twitter summoned the dame-in-waiting; we were no longer alone.

"Be witness, Mrs. Kyrle," she said. "My cousin and I are to marry."

The witness blinked at us nervously. "I hope you may be happy," said she.

Such was the course and fashion of my wooing: and that was almost all. The high contracting parties saw each other seldom during the days of legal interval that ensued; Goss and his clerk arranged the circumstances of our loveless wedlocking. Three times I called at the Bristol, and twice was for a few minutes received. But I dare not risk the least caress, I never kissed her; her eyes were on me cold, always cold as frosty moonlight, and Mrs. Kyrle was present, a mute foreboding duenna, all the while.

There was never any love-talk between us, and I was too proud to question her on the past or to bargain for the future. I was to marry her; she was wealthy; I was to have my own two thousand a year; it was a bargain, that was all I knew. We talked, of course! we talked of London and England, and politics, at home and abroad. "Would you be Republican or Democrat, if we lived in America?" I remember she said; "Royalist or Republican, in France?"

"Oh! does it matter much? I think a Republican, if it is all the same to you." That was my reply.

No love-talk, no further family revelations, no business-like arrangements; I was too proud a fool, too little thorough-going a mercenary, to stickle for the written

covenant that Goss in private urged me to require. "No, no,—I sell myself, but I shan't ask a contract," I told him. "Yet wait till I'm master,—she shall see!" Her tacit restraints so angered me that "Wait till I have her fast!" I used to say to myself at nights, as I walked my room at Evelyn Terrace, where my tenancy had still a fortnight to run.

Ours was a civil marriage; we tied the knot before a stout, red-whiskered registrar; Goss and the dame-in-waiting were the sole witnesses of our lifelong bargain. The hand I ringed drooped passive, the fetter slipped from her finger, and at first refused to be found.

Our witnesses followed us out; Mrs. Kyrle entered the carriage with us; Jefford Goss came to the kerbstone to say farewell.

"Much joy to you," he said, in the usual phrase, and then some inkling of a need for pity must have touched him, for he pushed the window down, thrust in his arm, and nervously gripped my hand. He gripped it in silence; and the duenna had a catch in her breath which sounded like a sob.

Ours was a prosaic wedding-breakfast. Upon the not immaculate napery of an iron-and-marble table in the banal refreshment-room of a dingy railway station we took the tasteless meal, my wife, Mrs. Kyrle, and I, almost in silence together. And then, as the boat-train came backing in, I went to the station-master for a compartment, and to the booking-office. When I returned Mrs. Kyrle was alone.

"Where's my wife?" I asked.

Lois was looking for the hotel servants with the trunks, Mrs. Kyrle explained. "She asked me to wait here till you came."

"Won't you go and help her, while I see the compartment labelled?"

The covert smile of the ticket-inspector who dabbed my name on the window annoyed me strangely, yet I knew that he knew me well. "Taking your own party this time, sir," he grinned, and I only tipped him a shilling. Then I went to the huge bare waiting-hall. Mrs. Kyrle was there. "Where's my wife?" I asked again.

"She doesn't seem to be here," the dame-in-waiting said shrinkingly. "The hotel-man hasn't seen her, he says."

Standing by his pile of trunks, the man lifted his cap and asked for orders. "Hand them over to this porter," said I. "And,—here!" He touched his cap and departed.

"Oh, where is she, where *is* she, Mr. Tanger?" Mrs. Kyrle spoke with that sob-like catch in her breath again.

"Get these things registered and put in," I told the porter. "Go look for her, Mrs. Kyrle; bring her to the compartment,—quick, or we'll lose the train." The coaches were filling up, the engine was neighing impatiently. I started off to the search myself.

I could not find my wife. The guard stood whistle in hand as I came running back to the train. "Found her, found her?" I cried to Mrs. Kyrle, who was trembling on the platform alone. The compartment was empty; tears were in Mrs. Kyrle's starch-blue eyes.

"Going on, sir?"—the porter held the door,—*"going on?"*

"No! curse you." Anger had suddenly bubbled up in me. The door was slammed, the sinuous long train began to serpentine out, and the harsh truth struck me,—almost as with a physical blow.

The woman of the bed-chamber trembled before me whitely, a couple of porters were staring. . . . I swivelled on my heel and cursed. . . . "My wife?" I turned again, and my voice broke on the word. "Confound you, Mrs. Kyrle,—*where's my wife?*"

VIII

"There was a Door to which I found no Key ;
There was a Veil past which I could not see."

"**S**TAY here till I get back !" I growled at Mrs. Kyrle, as I hurried outside the railway station. Yes, the cab-policeman had seen a good-lookin' young lady in a dark-green dress, what drove off in a hansom all by herself,—number,—he referred to his note-book,—number 11,701, G.E. "That means Great Eastun,—Liverpool Street," the cab-policeman was good enough to explain to me. I'm afraid I thanked him with a curse.

Quick, quick,—the Underground to the City,—how cursedly slow, this stopping at every station,—a cab would have done it quicker. Was there a train for Harwich and the Hook about that time? I tried to remember, but I could not,—I was dazed. How those porter-fellows had stared,—what jokes they would cut as I rushed away! Ah, Bishopsgate Street at last, at last!

I scurried into the vast echoing terminus and searched its labyrinth, platform after platform, room by room. But in vain; the lady in a green dress was not there; nobody could remember any special lady in a green dress; she couldn't have gone to Harwich, they said; there wouldn't be a boat-train for hours.

I hurried back to Mrs. Kyrle. Cabby 11,701 was on the rank again. Yuss, he'd druv a young lydy in green

what 'adn't any luggage. Great Eastun she told him fust, only she stopped the keb on the 'Bankment opp'site Sum'set 'Ouse. "Guv me 'alf a sov., she did. For a mile!"

Before I faced Mrs. Kyrle again I went to the buffet for brandy; I was faint, now that I had given up the chase. I am good at giving-up easily, but in this case I think I had reason. London is a bottle of hay; Lois Amaury Tanger would be quite cunning enough to know how to escape me to the end. Her accomplices, however,—ah! I would have a word for Mrs. Kyrle, if she also had not fled!

She had not, I could see her through the window, and very hastily I went in.

The forsaken bride is a tragical figure, but ridicule tinges the woes of the deserted groom. Himself he does not taste the humour; he rages, makes himself more laughable yet, utters "Treason!" against the world, all and sundry. It was not only Lois, it was Goss, it was the gentlewoman of the bed-chamber, who had betrayed me,—I felt sure of that. I raged, I was ridiculous,—I wonder the woman did not laugh in my face.

Alone with Mrs. Kyrle, in a mousy drab waiting-room of a place that seems sur-saturate with parting tears and melancholy hopes deferred, I stormed, called her "accomplice," threatened her with the Law, bore myself like the preposterous variety of fool, while she protested innocence in vain. I raged until at length the sheep turned wolfish, flamed up through her tears, told me that I was a fortune-hunter, that no gentleman would woo and wed as I had done. "How you *could*, for a moment, I *cannot* imagine!" she cried.

I began to believe that the pale, ash-coloured, blinking gentlewoman-in-waiting was, after all, no party to the plot.

She had answered Miss Tanger's advertisement, she had served her as companion and tirewoman a month for a fee of fifty pounds, she said ; the notes were in her purse at the moment. "See !" She displayed them and the clipped advertisement as well.

"Look !" she wept, "ten five-pound notes ! I can't keep them now !" and but for my hand holding hers back, she would have thrust them into the hospital-box on the wall. Well, yes,—she was poor, she would keep them,—yes, she had worked for them,—it was no crime for a gentlewoman to be poor and have to take a position, she sobbed ; the shameful thing was to accuse her of being party to the disgraceful affair !

"I have been uneasy for days," she went on. "Lois seemed so strange, so *very* peculiar. So unaccountable, you know. . . . She used to sob in her room at night,—I could hear her in mine. 'Oh, I can't, I *can't*!' she used to say, quite loud. Positively, Mr. Tanger, I have feared for her mind !"

"What did she mean by 'I can't, I can't ?' "

"Can't be wife to you, I suppose. Sometimes she would say to herself, suddenly, 'It will be good for him,—he is poor,—a fair exchange.' . . . When I asked her what she could possibly mean, she did not answer. Lois,—she wished me to call her Lois,—was so strange at times that *really* I almost felt I must leave her."

"She has left us instead."

"I have been married ; I know how a *nice* girl ought to feel about it beforehand, Mr. Tanger," the widow went on, "but *really*, Lois was so *very* peculiar ! She had such ideas of independence, and a girl's right to act without regard to rules established by men ! . . . She asked you to marry her, did she not ?"

"Almost," I growled.

"And yet I think she must have *hated* the idea of it, really!"

"It would almost seem so," said I, with what I thought heroic irony.

"At times, you know, she was charming, absolutely *charming*! But she can't really have been a very nice person, I fear." The widow's simplicity began to prove to me that she was not part and lot in the affair.

And then she grew pitiful over me,—a thing rather hard to stomach. "Oh, it is a *shame*, my poor Mr. Tanger,—I wish I could comfort you at all! She has behaved so perfectly odiously; she *can't* be what she ought to be; why, she told me never to leave you alone with her, after the first time! And there was hysteria,—subdued hysteria, I am sure! Don't you almost think that perhaps you may really have had rather a fortunate escape?"

"I'm fast tied to her, just the same," I said, grinding my heel into the floor. . . .

"She will have lost her frocks and things," Mrs. Kyrle observed, in a while.

"Gone on to Paris," said I.

"She will claim them there, perhaps?"

"Not she; far too clever for that."

"They were such *beautiful* things;—but then, she must be rich, she can buy everything new."

"How do we know that?"

There was every sign of wealth, Mrs. Kyrle had noticed . . . No; she had learned nothing about antecedents, nothing at all. Absolutely, she never spoke of her friends or her home, or anything of that kind, never once!

"Or her plans?"

Mrs. Kyrle knew nothing of her plans, she assured me; all that she had been told was that Lois and I were to go first to Paris.

"That was so," I agreed. "We decided to postpone settlements and settling-down,—you must have heard that, the third day I called. . . . Very well, Mrs. Kyrle, I must beg your pardon,—I do,—I'm not quite myself just now, it's—it's pretty grim for me, this,—pretty grim!"

Of course, poor Mr. Tanger!—she could well understand that, the widow wept. I think in her pity she might have kissed me, had I waited a minute longer.

But I rushed away; I chartered Cabby Number 11,701. "Go like hell!" I said, and post-haste we went to Austin Friars; never before, I suppose, did "the poor cheated bridegroom" fly to his vengeance in the chariot that ravished the runaway bride.

I flew to my vengeance; I was certain that Goss was a villain. Post-haste we went to the City, but the villain had quitted Austin Friars hours before, it appeared; he would not be back there that day, Miller, his clerk, assured me, wondering and staring at my presence there and my truculent manners while he spoke. For Miller was aware of the Tanger marriage; it was Miller who went for the licence. I dare say he took note of my looks and manners, as a model of what a bridegroom's ought never to be.

"The Westminster!" I shouted to Cabby 11,701; but we drew a blank at Goss's hotel as well. Plainly, he was keeping out of my way. "Not in his room, not in the house at all," the major-domo informed me blandly.

"*The fellow's gone off with her himself!*" I swore, with a stamp on the tiles in the hall and a downward dash of my fist. The major-domo began to regard me unfavourably; tactfully he edged me towards the folding-doors, where again I stood to gesticulate and talk with myself. The ass I must have looked!

"Gone off with her,—that's the explanation! My Jove, I hope he has! I'll get a divorce and—and thumping

damages! And strike the rascal off the rolls!" I was muttering, almost aloud.

But then, why should they have done it in that way? If they had meant to pair, why need they have sought me out and my cousin go through the ceremony? My cousin, indeed! *Was* she my cousin, after all?

"What—ah—name—ah—shall I tell Mr. Goss—ah?" The major-domo had edged me out upon the steps by this time; he may have been looking round for policemen. "What—ah—name—ah?"

"*Name!* oh, curse the name!" was my reply, I remember. Name, indeed! what else could the girl have married me for, if not for my name? Yet it was hers already. Name of the fiend!

Then we drove to the Constitutional Club. "Not here, Sir," the hall-porter said, with a stare.

"Where to nex', guv'ner?" Cabby 11,701 grinned. Where next was what I was at the moment asking myself. Scotland Yard? Why should I so advertise my misfortune? "MISSING! Supposed to have run away, the wife of Alain Tanger, TWENTY POUNDS REWARD!"—I couldn't afford more, it would be a job to raise even so much! . . . And then, the endless colloquies with detectives in tweeds who look as though they ought still to be policemen in blue; and the visits to mortuaries, Thames-side taverns, perhaps,—and all that! . . . Ah, no!

But where, then? . . . Where could I still the sense of shame and anger that tweaked and tortured me? It was evening by this: where and how should I spend my wedding-night? . . . My *wedding-night*,—good heavens!

About eight o'clock next morning I rang myself in at Evelyn Terrace. A letter lay on my table: I sprang at it. It was sure to be a letter from Lois.

It was a letter from a banker. The manager of the London office of the London, New York, and Paris Banking Corporation had the pleasure to inform Mr. Alain Tanger that the sum of two thousand pounds sterling had been placed to the credit of an account opened in his name, by a client whose identity the bank was forbidden to disclose. A similar sum was to be placed at the disposal of Mr. Alain Tanger per annum. The bank would be glad if Mr. Alain Tanger would favour with an early call, to oblige with a sample of his signature, and receive a cheque-book.

I cast the letter on the floor and stamped on it. "Curse her!" I shouted, "does she think I sold my name for *this*?" . . . I think I was mad for the time.

I must have seemed drunken-mad as, furious, unbrushed, dingy with yesterday's linen, and wild-eyed from a roaring night, I raged away to the Westminster again. The major-domo must have been at breakfast, for I penetrated to the vestibule and made my way upstairs unchecked; I remembered the turns to Goss's rooms.

Yes, Mr. Goss was in, but he was at breakfast—"and really,"—the servant protested at the door; but I pushed him aside and went raging in.

"You didn't go off with her after all, then, curse you!" I shouted, as I dashed the banker's letter down upon the table, into the marmalade.

The lawyer jumped up, astounded: his fingers went to his beard. "Great Scott, man! what's wrong? Where's your wife? What the deuce are you doing *here*?"

His surprise was sincere; it blunted the point of my attack. I had gone with my fists itching to hammer the fear of honest fools into a schemester's brain, but now, "Then you don't know?" I said, wearily dropping into a chair; and I had to be doctored a little before I could tell my tale.

"Devilish sorry, devilish sorry!" Goss kept on saying, almost tremblingly. "But—my dear man! you didn't think *I* was in the swindle?"

"Afraid I did. Put yourself in my shoes. You'd have thought the same."

"But, my dear Tanger, your wife,"—he saw me wince at that word, and he changed it,—“my client I never heard of till six weeks ago! Didn't know her from Eve, when she came the first time, said she'd met me yachting, gave me some clues, and paid expenses in advance.”

"The regular business, then?"

"Quite the regular business,—like any other client, except that she seemed masterful, and strange. Second time, she showed me your article, said I was to get into touch with you soon as possible, paid twenty five-pound notes down on the nail for exes. and all that,—she was good style and charming, everything seemed right,—how was I to know the girl wasn't on the square?"

"You could see the business was fishy, couldn't you?" I grumbled.

"How so? Not at all," he said, anxiously. "Almost ordinary business, up to the point she told me she wanted to marry you, the night of the play. . . . Seemed a bit queer that, of course; but what struck me about it most was that you were a deuced lucky fellow."

"Wonderfully lucky," I groaned, and he stammered off to his usual change of subject. "Beastly cold morning," he said, and "Oh! hang your weather," said I, getting up and stamping round.

"By all means," said he. "Curse your fill, my poor fellow, if it eases you at all. . . . Of course you'll set about to find her?"

"Not I,—I never want to put eyes on her again. Don't you suppose I was fond of her, my Jove!"

"But there must be some mistake, man!" he said, almost angrily. "I'll guarantee she could explain if she would!"

"Explain!" I sneered. "Is this the sort of thing that one *explains*?" . . .

"We've got to find her," he said, with conviction, after a while.

"Not I," I fumed. "Besides, I've no cash to spend on the search."

"There's the two thousand pounds," he said, very quietly, with his eyes on mine.

At that I boiled over. "Do you think I'll touch a penny of *that*?"

"Well, I thought you wouldn't, Tanger,—'pon my word, I never thought——"

"I mean to refuse the money, of course."

"Then let me write the bank for you,—let me have the pleasure of that, without a fee."

He went to his desk and wrote; I saw his hand tremble. His client, Mr. Alain Tanger, denied and refused ownership in the money; bank must return the credit to account of payor. Should payor wish to make representations to Mr. Alain Tanger, must do so by letter addressed to Jefford Goss. Meantime, by concealing identity and whereabouts of payor, bankers would be rendering themselves accessory to a breach of the law.

"Strike the last part out," I said.

"About the breach of law?"

"Certainly."

"You're quite clear you won't claim conjugal rights,—won't try and find her?"

"Quite. I perfectly loathe the thought of her now."

"Not even to get your marriage annulled?"

"Ah, *that*, yes! If you can do *that*! . . . Different thing altogether."

"Well, now, see here," he said, reflectively. "I got two hundred in notes from her as my fee, yesterday, before we left the Bristol for the—the registrar's. I spend a lot on myself, Tanger, and I'm a lawyer,—which means that I epitomise the unscrupulous, of course! But, do you know?—I'm rather fond of money, but—that couple of hundred rather seems to burn my fingers. I'm a fool, but there,—it does. . . . I'm rather in the way of thinking I've helped to do you the deuce of a bad turn, and . . . I tell you what I'll do with that couple of hundred, Tanger; I'll spend it tracing this young woman out. I'll spend the lady's cash in catching the lady, and we'll break her wedding-ring, by gad we will!"

"No Scotland Yard," I said. "I won't have Scotland Yard in it."

"Lord, no,—trust me for that!" He had got his aplomb again. "A lawyer never calls the police in if he can help it. You don't know what lawyers think of the Courts! Leave it to me, my dear man; I'll spend that couple of hundred gladly, and I rather fancy I'm on a clue,—I'll warrant she *is* a Tanger, after all."

"There's the white lock," I said gloomily. "My father had it. He must have had my dream as well."

"What dream?"

I told him of the recurrent vision. He sat listening and reflecting. "Depend upon it she's a Tanger right enough," he swore.

And this is why I shrank from Patrick's talk about the two pillows, and why it was possible that last night I could fancy for a moment a singing girl was my wife.

My wife! "It's a wise man that knows his own wife," the proverb ought to be.

IX

"More black than ashbuds in the front of March."

I SIT in the chamber historic, and write, write ; it gives me a kind of comfort to tell myself the story of it all.

I came straight here from the Café of the Comedy, and have been at the pen ever since. I sit in semi-gloom, companioned by the portraits and one wax candle. Ferdinand Bourbon, Gregory Chiaramonti, and Arthur Wellesley stiffly regard me from their rosewood frames, and whenever the candle flickers the crowns and mitres and leading-staves seem to dance derisive on the wall.

It is long past midnight, and the sounds I hear are the stamp of horses in stables the other side the courtyard, and a chorus of snoring on this. Ye foghorns ! how these French folk snore. Groschaud is snoring too, I expect, in his bachelor quarters, at the barracks, nearly a mile away.

Groschaud ? How, then, does Groschaud come into my life at all ? My coming to Brivac has nothing to do with the hunt for Mrs. Tanger. I take no share in that search, nor does Groschaud, of course.

I suppose I'm writing this down to-night because Patrice rubbed a half-healed sore. A man does not get the go-by the way I got it without a deep wound. It is the independence and haughty refusal of the creature that angers

me ; and the cunning ! The wound throbs again to-night. I write to anodyne it, if I may.

That astonishing likeness upset me : I'm killing time and cheating wakefulness with my pen. And since I choose to tell the story on paper at all, it is just about here that my acquaintance with Flapp, the mulatto, should come in.

I was widowed early in March of this year, 1899. April and May I spent toting round Yurup, as they called it, a family from Albany, State of New York ; they told me, by-the-bye, that there used to be Tangers near Albany. I shipped these good folk off at Genoa for Naples and the Atlantic ; and then I went to London and made calls at Ludgate Circus and Trafalgar Square. But the Agencies had made their arrangements for the season, they told me. They must have heard about the fooling at Sorrento. I found myself left, in the tourist harvest-time, without a shred of employ.

Nothing to do with my days, naught to keep my thoughts off my unlucky adventures in courtship and matrimony, I grew morose and miserable. "A jolly mess I've made of life !" was my daily reflection as I stewed in my den at Evelyn Terrace. "A mess indeed !" I used to repeat as I dined at Duvert's, the little French restaurant off Compton Street. "A devil of a mess !" I used to groan, as I rose from the surreptitious green tables hard by, hardly ever a winner, bad luck to 'em !

I was steeped in foreboding ; I never saw a white-headed failure of an educated man come shabby along London streets without telling myself : "There goes what Alain Tanger *will* be, some day !" Looking ahead, down a narrowing and darkening vista, I saw myself shuffle along, at first in the frayed frock-coat and ostentatious gloves of rusty gentility, and then in the harsh tabard of the sandwich-

man; with the penultimate workhouse and final plank coffin in view.

A pretty state of mind for a man with a couple of thousand awaiting his cheques at the bank! That consideration struck me almost humorously at times. The bank had written Goss to say that the payor's positive orders were to hold two thousand per annum at my disposal; the money was Mr. Tanger's, legally and absolutely; it would accumulate to his credit if he refused to draw on it,—that was all. I saw a shrug of worldly-wise shoulders in the final words of the letter, and, "Why shouldn't I draw?" I argued with myself sometimes; "it is the over-estimated value of a poor commodity,—a good deal more than the market price of the name I sold."

Whatever Goss may say, I am convinced that Lois Amaury was no Tanger, that she married me to become a Tanger, and that there must be some value in the name, to her. She took my name and ran away from myself: hated me, shrank from me,—proud virginal creature! The insult of it I will never forgive.

Goss has failed to trace her. Every directory published in the kingdom has been searched, in vain. Two Miss Tangers have been found, but one is Alice and elderly, the other is Mary Jane. Goss has only mounted one step higher in my precious genealogy. My grandfather, Charles Alain Tanger, born near Weymouth, 1814, had for mother one Mary Beulah, *née* Cray, and for father one Alain Charles Tanger, Esquire. It is significant, perhaps,—Goss thinks so,—how the changes are rung on "Alain Charles" and "Charles Alain" in my noble family; but what it signifies even Goss doesn't pretend to tell, although he fusses about it endlessly,—almost suspiciously, indeed.

"Alain is, of course, a name uncommon, the French

or Norman or Breton form of Allan, Alan, or Allen ; and about the year 1814 there were many foreign prisoners of war set free near Weymouth," Goss says again and again. But then, Tanger is not a French patronymic : the Bottin directory has been searched for the name in vain. Something has been done, too, by an agent in the United States,—but what a vast and hopeless field of search ! In June Goss had to confess that at the end of three months and two hundred pounds he was foiled.

"But I don't mean to give up," he frowned ; a model and lesson in persistence is Goss. "Why not draw on the two thou' for a fresh hunt over yonder ?" He had been struck by what I told him about certain Tangers near Albany. "She isn't British, or French, or Irish ; ten to one she's Yankee. Come now, write me a cheque for a hundred or two, and I'll put a new man on, out there.

"No !" said I. "I don't feel I can."

"Then by gad, I'll do it myself !"

"You really mustn't," I said.—"You've done too much already."

"Dine with me to-night, and talk the matter over then."

"I can't," said I.

"Why not, old man ?"

"Because I couldn't give you a dinner back."

"Tanger," he said, "you're absurdly proud."

"You see,—I need to be,—I've got my precious name to be proud of." And that was my latest course of polite conversation with my friend and honorary solicitor, Jefford Goss. He is not quite easy to talk with now ; he seems ashamed and perturbed, almost as though he were guilty towards me. Sometimes I get my suspicions of him again. He does not know I am now in France.

Goodness knows I'd have been glad to dine with him

that day, for I was almost getting to a pass for a decent meal. I was poorer than ever. I had lost at the tables, terribly,—for me. That waiting two thousand became the deuce of a temptation. I used to see it in my dreams,—all in sovereigns, too,—piled up in the corner of a lit strong-room, with Lois Amaury standing near, and telling me to fill my pockets galore.

Dividend day was nearly a week off yet, and I had almost broken my last sovereign when I entered Duvert's, four nights ago, somewhat late, for dinner. You can actually dine on four courses for eighteenpence at Duvert's.

I rather patronise Duvert's; it is a rendezvous for foreigners and British bohemians, but it was almost empty that night; the hour was late for dinner and early for supper, I suppose. Yet the queer, low, long room was not quite void. "Behold the very man!" I heard Duvert say, as I showed through the swing doors. "Bon soir, M'sieur Tanger, goes it well? Come hither a little, M'sieur,—dine, then, with my friend Auguste Flapp and me?"

I rather like Duvert, the wizened little Frenchman, and willingly enough I took my seat beside him; opposite Flapp, the darkie swell.

Flapp is by way of being a dandy coon. His huge, long loose gelatinous body wobbled as he half-rose to return my scrupulous bow. His tall flyaway collar showed whiter than white against his shiny dark skin. There is a general shininess about Flapp; his immense frock-coat shows shinily new, his tie is resplendent red satin, his white waistcoats sheen with the glaze of the flat-iron, his diamonds are greasily bright, and he is shinily bald except for two crescents of grizzled wool above his ugly big ears. The half-burnt cigarettes that he tastes between the courses hang out from his blubbery faunesque lips with a shine of gilt

tip against the purple pulp; a gold-rimmed monocle, gold-filigree chained, shines as it pushes a bushy eyebrow up into an expression of perpetual surprise; his eyes from under baggy lids survey you with a boastful cunning; they are shiny eyes.

"The very man for you, Auguste," Duvert said, in his native tongue. "See you, M'sieur Tanger is English, which is a point: he will well pass for a travelling Jean Bulle. But he speaks the French quite facile, and he is in disponibility at this moment: say, then, M'sieur Tanger, is it not so?"

"Yes, I'm out of a berth, Duvert," said I.

"Hold, then; I shall tell him, Auguste," and Duvert dropped his voice to a whisper as he told me.

M'sieur Flapp was a great wine-merchant, it appeared: M'sieur Flapp required the service of a confidential messenger, on wine-business, to a certain M'sieur Groschaud at Brivac-la-Joyeuse, in France. M'sieur Groschaud had a valuable commodity to sell, it appeared: M'sieur Groschaud was the object of much solicitation from the wine-trade; other great merchants of wine were nibbling at Monsieur Groschaud, oh yes! Flapp himself dare not go to Brivac; he was too notorious, Duvert insisted,—it would compromise the enterprise, he was so well known in the trade.

"It is my dam face!" said Flapp, in English of a sort: "My dam blackness, it is so known. Zee you, M'sieur Tanger, I am rich, I am a two-times millionaire of francs, I go to be a millionaire of sterling one day, but peste! my blackness, it is ze diable! Ze lofely women of London, zey will not lofe me, zey will not at me look twice. I must a title have. Zee you, my de-ar Mister, I, I am a scholaire, I the Greek and Latin know, odi profanum vulgus et arceo, I was student of Paris at ze Universit.

But my dam blackness is ze diable. I tell you, my father, he was gentilman of Martinique—I am French gentilman also. But well I would give all my moneys, or half of zem, to have a clean face, Mister Tangare, like yours.” And he cursed his complexion in voluble French, as he lit his stump of cigarette again, at the close of his eighteenpenny dinner.

“M’sieur Tanger is the man for the affair, yes !” Duvert kept repeating. “M’sieur Tanger, he is disposable, yes. M’sieur Tanger, he will take the employ.”

The idea of employment, of any decent kind, rather smiled at me just then, and I said I was willing to go to Brivac. But what to do ?

Ah well, what Flapp wanted was a reliable Englishman, a gentilman, who would not look like a traveller in the wine-trade, the kind of Englishman whose appearance in Brivac would not awake suspicion,—and yet somebody who spoke the French language comfortably and could skilfully handle a difficult affair. As his friend Duvert assured him that M’sieur Tanger was indeed the very man, he, Auguste Flapp, was willing. He would give to M’sieur Tanger a letter, secretly to be conveyed to M’sieur Groschaud. If M’sieur Groschaud was willing to accept Flapp’s tender for his zo-invaluable wines, then M’sieur Groschaud would secretly approach M’sieur Tanger and require the sum of twenty zousand francs by way of handsel. Eh well, since his friend Duvert was convinced of M’sieur Tanger, he, Flapp, would to M’sieur Tanger hand over twenty beautiful clean-faced zousand-franc notes. But also one hundred pounds for expenses. And a fee. But all very secret !

“Seems a queer way of doing business,” I said ; but was at once assured that it was quite the usual mode of conducting great affairs in the wine-trade of France.

“I take a receipt from him, of course ?”



"Ah no, M'sieur need not require a receipt. Ah no, M'sieur Tanger's word zat the money is paid, zat will be sufficient." It appeared that honesty positively radiated from the eloquent countenance of M'sieur Tanger. Only,—there would be a letter from M'sieur Groschaud, to be carried to him, Auguste Flapp; and zat would be ze discharge for ze money.

"Very queer way: very queer business," said I. "Don't quite like it. Don't like it at all!"

Ah, but if M'sieur Tanger would use his superexcellent wits in baffling zose nibbling diables ze other wine-merchants, zen M'sieur Flapp would with pleasure hand to M'sieur Tanger ze fee of, zay, three zousand francs; not reckoning ze money of ze expenses. Just to carry ze letter from Brivac to Angoulême, zat was all. M'sieur Flapp would wait at Angoulême; he dared not show his dam black face nearer to Brivac zan zat. Though Angoulême was not far away,—why, it was near, it was almost quite near, it would even be a pleasant little journey for M'sieur Tanger. M'sieur agreed? good! And when could M'sieur be ready for to depart?

"Nine o'clock boat-train to-morrow," I said. "Victoria."

The Frenchman looked at me with admiration.

Ah, zese Anglish, zo always prompt, si pratique! Nine hours of to-morrow! Ah well, M'sieur Flapp would not be outdone. Yes, Auguste Flapp, too, would be pratique and prompt; he, too, would arrive at the nine o'clock train, to voyage in the zo-charming society of M'sieur Tanger zo far as Paris. Meantime, behold ze half hundred pound of expenses. And a big pocket-book came out of a big pocket in the big, shiny flapping frock-coat. And then, that business over, M'sieur Flapp sat perspiring and panting, holding himself with his elbows at his sides in a way this reminded me of penguins.

"You part?" he said, for I rose.

"Till to-morrow, just before nine ; Victoria."

"To-morrow, nine hours, I meet you. Ze station of God zave your Gracious. But tace!" He put a finger to his blubber lips. "Not one word. Oh no! To nobody. A secret zat we go,—ah, a terrible secret!"

X

"I stayed up till the bellman came by, as I was writing this very line."

BUT a nine o'clock in the morning train is rather early for a London Frenchman, and Flapp had to be catapulted from the arms of two porters and a ticket-inspector into my compartment, at one second past the hour. He descended with a squelch, and his tin-and-cardboard valise came in through the window atop of him.

"Ze debble! Zee what I zuffer for ze cause!" he groaned with the first breath that re-entered his body; and when I heard that anguished utterance I began to think that perhaps my errand might have little to do with the wine-trade after all. But Flapp had to be comforted in the English train, and cared for on the Channel boat; so that it was only when we were running past Abbeville that I had time to consider the suspicion which was forming in my mind.

A little matter had made conjecture more precise. At Boulogne station the mulatto bought the *Petit Caporal*, and it was the sight of him studying that ha'penny Bonapartist rag which put me on the scent.

Wine-trade, eh? . . . I sat up in my corner with a jerk. Groschaud? *Groschaud*! Why,—of course,—Groschaud of Siam!—that must be the man! . . . Wine-trade, indeed! no wine-merchant at all, Groschaud!

We were alone together, and I turned on the panting mulatto quite fiercely. "It's *Major* Groschaud I go to, I suppose? *Filastre* Groschaud, hey?"

The millionaire of francs dropped his *Petit Caporal* and groaned as he stooped for it. Then he stammered that he didn't know M'sieur Groschaud's other name.

"But it's the soldier, isn't it? The officer who nearly set France and England by the ears? On the Mekong?"

Monsieur Auguste Flapp was almost inclined to think that possibly it might happen to turn out that it was perhaps the same man. But what of that, in the wine-trade?

I glowered at him angrily, and he blushed a dirty grey. "I shall get out at Amiens," I said. "I shall go back at once. You have deceived me, M'sieur. Your wine-trade is French politics. Do you think I shall tout for you, with an enemy of England like *Filastre* Groschaud?"

But no, but no,—thunder of the sky, no! It was not an enemy of England,—it was a dear friend of England that Groschaud was to be made! Flapp adored the grande England, the zo-grande Kingdom United, country of liberties with other people, grave of the dead Empereur and asylum of the widowed Eugénie! The politic of Auguste Flapp, was it not justement to have the grande England and the belle France friends indeed?

"How, then, M'sieur?" I almost laughed, for he was wobbling jellyfish-like with agitation and the jolt of the train.

Was it not plain? he wanted to know. The Bonapartists were the only French friends of England; it was the filthy Republic endangered the peace. If only the Prince-General Louis Napoleon, young and handsome, of St. Petersburg, could reign at Paris,—ah, then France and England would be sisters for ever, in good accord. And

the enormous Russia, too! Russia would learn to love England. The young Prince Louis, was he not bosom friend to the young Tzar?

"Zee you, M'sieur Tanger, me, I worship ze arriving Emperor. Not zat fat pig of a Victor, no!—but ze gallant beau Louis of Russia. But yes, certainly yes! I shall one of my millions spend on his cause wiz a light heart. My father, he was gentilhomme Bonapartist,—I am gentilhomme Bonapartist,—ze title of my father, it shall to me be given, zo it shall cover my dam blackness. Ze Princesse Mathilde, she is as the Prince-General's second mother; I shall be his humble little brother; it is for zat I shall buy ze sword of ze zo-famous Groschaud!"

And that was why I was to go to Brivac!

Filastre Groschaud is a name to conjure with in France. The secret letter, and the earnest and hansom of twenty thousand francs, were meant to woo the Major into the Bonapartist camp; and the privacy, the working of the plot from London, the employment of an Englishman as messenger were devised to outwit the Royalist and Republican spies,—the other "wine-merchants" who would be watching Groschaud.

"A very pretty plan, indeed!" said I. "I'll wig Duvert for this! . . . Yet——"

I leaned back in my corner, smoked, and mused. Why not, why not? That is my favourite query.

The business was to be well paid; I could not afford to miss the couple of hundred pounds I should net. The Tourist Agencies would no longer employ me, it seemed; I was beggar, not chooser; I must work up a living somehow and somewhere. Political couriership might be a paying game, and would certainly be exciting. Why not, why not? . . .

"Zat is why I arrive at ze train zo late," Monsieur Flapp

was saying meanwhile. "To baffle ze spies. Ah, I am cunning, me ! Zee you, I am a conzpirer born."

He swelled with pride.

Why not, why not ? . . . Already I had dipped into the fellow's first fifty pounds,—for my ticket to Paris. And I could not refund on the spot,—had not even the price of the journey back from Amiens in my pocket, to spare of my own. And here we were slowing into Amiens before I could make up my mind. . . .

"I'll go on as far as Paris with you, anyhow," I told the fellow, as he came pantingly along beside me, towards the buffet.

I have known two or three men who enjoy the pompous mystery and titillating risks of conspiratorship. This fellow Flapp is one of them. He is an ass, but an earnest ass ; he believes in Bonapartism and wants a title. He is a coward ; but I fancy conspiratorship is more alluring to cowards than to braver men. Conspiracy represents the fascination of danger wrapped in the probability of safety ; safety wrapt in danger seems to be the allurements for the brave.

The mulatto dandy looked at me with almost pathetic inquiry, as again we boarded the train and began to jolt towards Paris. I smiled at his anxious look. Why not ? After all, *why not* ?

I needed distraction and change of thoughts and scene, as well as cash and employ. The adventure rather beamed at me, on the whole. Why not ? . . .

In a platonical way I have always leaned towards Bonapartism for France. Napoleonism is my historical hobby : something like Napoleonism is what France requires. She longs for a Master again ; she is the woman among nations, unhappy unless Petruchioed and rough-ridden by a Man.

Why not, indeed ? If I found the intrigue bode ill

for England I could warn our Foreign Office. Better hint the secret in Downing Street than refuse the chance to learn any secret at all. Strictly considered, however, I was to be messenger only, with not much more moral responsibility than a postman's. Why not?

What the fellow said is true, moreover, in a way. The French Nationalists and the weak Republic together constitute a danger to England. A Bonaparte could quiet Drumont, Judet, Mercier, Coppée, and all the waspish gang: what the gang really seek is a King,—Dictator,—Emperor,—anybody for a change,—anything rather than the admirable bourgeois Loubet.

Most likely the Republic will pass; and better the Bonapartists than the Orléanists instead; a Bourbon Restoration would King the man who flouted the Lady of the land which gave his forefathers refuge; and a Bourbon Restoration might mean war between the two coasts of the Channel.

But "The Empire, it is peace," might again be true,—of peace with England, anyhow. Peace with England was the Bonapartist traditional policy since Waterloo; and the tie has strengthened since 1870. I thought of the mingled tears of the widowed Queen and the widowed and childless Empress, of Chislehurst and Osborne, of the young gay life spilt in Zulu sands.

Then there is Germany, there is Russia; I hate the Prussians; a Bonaparte might link us with Russia instead; and the true foreign policy for England is to come to friendly terms with Russia, I am sure.

Sophistry, all that; but a moderately brainy man can persuade himself into anything; he can persuade nobody so easily as himself. I persuaded Alain Tanger that high politics and patriotism almost compelled him to go to Brivac. And that is how I am here.

Behold me, then, a Bonapartist emissary. I forgave that black deceiver, Flapp ; in Paris I pocketed the other fifty pounds for expenses, the sealed letter, and the twenty thousand-franc notes. And then I set off southward, going by way of Limoges without stop. One day later Flapp was to arrive at Angoulême. If needs be, we were to write each other in parables ; he was to address me at Brivac by the so well-known and truly British name of Smit ; I was to put on my envelopes "M. le Brun, Poste Restante, Angoulême, Charente." And so I came to the Rusty Lance.

I stop the pen ; it is morning, almost ; the morning of my birthday, by-the-bye.

THE DIARY

XI

"'Tis all a Chequer-board of nights and days,
Where Destiny with men for Pieces plays."

July 16, 1899.

TO-DAY I tick off the eight-and-twentieth on the calendar of my years: to-day I turn a leaf,—this page of my record, the only new leaf I am likely to turn, I fear. I diarise, for I fancy that at Brivac I shall not lack for matter. It was two in the morning before I got to bed, and already there is more to tell. Brivac is going to be eventful. France is dotted over with calm small towns where the days are as the water that slides past a sleeper in a moored boat on a canal, so dull, so alike, so slow. But not at Brivac.

Pretty soon after I got to bed I must have passed into that degree of slumber which is more than a doze and less than sleep. For a thread of thought seemed to run through all, of thought that trembled on the brink of dream. I did not get my vision of the boat and schooner again: the spectra were new,—one does not pass the night in a room that chambered a discrowned King, a Pope humiliated, and a Wellington victorious, without remembering one's predecessors of the pillow. I had the surprise to remember, also; but the merging personalities of Bluetie and Lois Amaury Tanger died quickly out of my ken. What I next

saw was the return of the weak bigot Ferdinand Bourbon through Brivac towards Spain.

Brivac stands at the trifurcation of three old posting roads, to Paris, Bayonne, and Cette. In the fateful year 'Fourteen the doors of Ferdinand's courtly prison at Valençay were flung open. Frost and snow, the white anger of the Most High, had scorched up the army of Moscow, and Napoleon loosed his royal hostage in the hope that the ex-prisoner might free the army of Soult by stopping the war in Spain. For the Pyrenees existed again: Soult's last live soldiers were backing from the Peninsular soil; the Most Catholic King was returning to his patrimony, and outside, below my chamber, I could hear the laughter and weeping of Spanish prisoners of war. . . . Prisoners of war, did I say? *What* was it Jefford Goss was suggesting? My grandfather, Charles Alain, *was* he a prisoner of war? At Weymouth? . . .

But it is no longer Ferdinand Bourbon I see: it is Wellington who sits in my room. Rain drums on the door-panes, boughs clap against the garden-window, fire-light reddens the walls, steam fumes from the spattered riding-boots he stretches toward crackling logs. I watch the stiff straight English figure; I see that beaky nose, the jutting chin, those steadfast eyes of his; I read the thoughts that wrinkle his high brow. The Peace has come too soon, he grumbles: another month, and all Aquitaine should be English soil once more; three months of further war, and from a base at Tours "by Gad I would have marched on Paris! . . . The fellow's abdicated too soon, God damn him for no gentleman! And now I'll never get the chance to lick him myself!" . . . So growls the Duke, blind to the hurrying fate that is bringing on the broken revelry by night, the dawn of Quatre-Bras, the set of Waterloo.


The Duke is on his way to Paris, summoned to the councils of the Allied Sovereigns there ; to-morrow he will ride northward, almost unattended ;—nay, he is already gone. . . . No soldier sits in my chamber now . . . it is a priest, the High Priest of Christendom ; it is Pope Pius the Seventh who dangles those cold fleshless hands above the fitful fire.

Gregory Chiaramonti shivers within his robe of dense white serge ; a blood-red Cardinal stands in the golden candle-light and drops a thick green cordial spot by spot into a silver cup. . . . The Pope sits musing ; I know his thoughts. Behind him lies the long humiliation of the Concordat and his five years' prisoning at Fontainebleau ; caged, caged, the High Priest of the world ! . . . Ah, the weary grey outlook on the formal gardens, the sentry-watched walks on the gritty terrace above the drear stagnant water. . . . "Gesu mio !" he groans : "Aquila rapax !" The memory is at its bitterest still. . . .

Yet at last the Usurper is falling, falling. The priestly prisoner passes the unguarded gates, avoids the battlefields of the eastern route, escapes by Brivac towards his throne upon St. Peter's Rock. To-morrow the Servant of the servants of God will fare forth again, between ranks of kneeling peasantry, across Guienne and Languedoc, to take ship at Cette. . . .

Ghosts, ghosts in the chamber historic ! And yet . . . *that is no ghost, the cassocked figure yonder !* The priest who steals from my bed-foot towards the glimmering panes, *he is no ghost !*

The paling moonlight mixed with the twilight of dawn reveals him to my corporal eyes. I see him dark against the glimmering square, I hear him breathe, my door closes behind him, I am no longer dreaming, "By God !" I cry, leaping out, "there *was* a priest here a minute ago !"



The notes, the letter ! But they were safe, safe in my waistcoat's inner pocket, under my pillow, where a hand that sought them must have touched my sleeping head.

But yet,—was it thief or phantom ? I stood barefooted in the gallery outside, and stared and listened. I caught no glimpse of a whisking black soutane ; the gallery was empty of any mortal but myself ; I heard the stamp of horses and the saw-like snores of sleepers in other rooms ; I heard the crow of an early cock, the rustle of arousing leaves. But that was all.

Dream, fancy, or yes,—ghost, perhaps ? And yet,—my door was unfastened ! Surely, I turned the key last night ?

I turned the key this early morning as I re-entered, and presently sleep took me again, sound sleep of mind and body together. It was broad day when again I woke, and there was a rattling at the door.

"If M'sieur milor' will open,—it is that I carry M'sieur his coffee,—bon jour, M'sieur !"

The room was filled with brown fragrance, and Patrice set down his tray with its primrose pat of butter and amber crescent roll.

"Say, then, mon ami, this chamber of mine, is it haunted ?"

No such thing as a revenant would ever be permitted by Madame, Pat told me with a grin.

"Say, then, is there a priest among the guests of Madame ?"

"But certainly,—it is a pilgrim, M'sieur." My Irish Frenchman showed his teeth with contempt. "The Abbé Ledru ! M'sieur milor' can hear him how he snores, in the Number Eight. Snores he not, hein ? As a pig ? . . . Tiens, tiens ! desires M'sieur milor' *more* cold water ? Sacrrrebleu !"

An hour later I was crossing the boulevard : a company

of infantry,—part of Groschaud's command, very like,—white-bloused and white-trousered, carrying the entrenching tool, went swinging past me to tuck of drum. They passed, and then, by a crooked way, I penetrated to the heart of what I take to be about the quaintest of all the little bourgs of France.

Even yet at Brivac folk “fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world”; even yet at Brivac leisured labour, talkative toil, siesta rest, joyous forenoons, and charmed evenings persist. Brivac remains what Rouen erstwhile was, what Troyes and Lisieux yet partly are, in its gabled frontages, turretted corners, jagged sky-lines, Limousin roof-eaves, cobblestone random rues, and strait dark ruelles; racy with the tang of careless life pulsating under the garb of eld.

Around the church the market spreads, and upon the market-place a dozen slant streets and dim alleys converge. They wander titupping and devious, as if with merry drunken wavers, from the tree-shaded circle around. The tree-shaded circle is the boulevard that runs where ramparts frowned defiance to the Lords of Malemorte and Turenne in feudal days. These crooked streets and jagged clefts of alleys end at the market-place, in corners broken by hooded turrets, pepper-box stone dovecots, and balconied gables reached by outside stairways richly carved. Beneath and around, the shops of Brivac glare with rainbow hues; the grey of age, the russet of decay, the tarnished silver of lichens, the green of houseleek, and the red, yellow, and blue of the paint-pot, blend and commingle there, under the orange brightness of the sun; and there is rich chiaroscuro in the sun-shot shadows of fifty huddled little ruelles and rues.

Words cannot picture Brivac, and no Pennell or Railton has found the way to this delightful spot. The French

themselves can hardly know it. It lies aside from the trunk lines to the pleasure-resorts. I cannot conceive a better place for the purpose of the Republican Government in sending Groschaud here ; they fear lest he, so popular, should develop into a Boulanger and enthrone the sword ; but Brivac is hidden and sleepy, it conceals him and it narcotises him, no doubt ; to be energetic and revolutionary must be almost impossible here.

Consider the church of Brivac : nowhere is a church to be seen more aged and quaint ; its tall, blunt, wedge-topped tower is thrust aslant from the knot of the cruciform like a clenched hand brandished up at the sky ; at lintel, arch, moulding, buttress, and portal, weather and time have left no angle sharp. The church stands tall amongst squat shops and cheapings ; it is cinctured with commerce ; the high-shouldered nave and blinded aisles are propped outside by wooden booths and tiled hutches, where merry bargaining goes on all day. The cobbler, tinsmith, mock-jeweller, melon-seller, and flap-capped vendor of her home-made lace hold fast their booths against the venerable walls ; anciently, no doubt, it was rosary and taper sellers who gained the right to harbour there. The shops block the side-portals of the church, hug the buttresses, and proudly shrug away from the temporary stalls and tented umbrellas of the transitory market-folk. Consider the church ; there is no quainter to be found.

The studded leathern door of it shut out the market din as I entered, and I found myself within the darkest, emptiest, most silent little fane of France. Hardly in Spain is the sun more jealously excluded. I think the folk of Brivac cannot be devout ; theirs is a church of sombre deadness, null, almost abandoned, mummy-like, a corpse of decaying stone from which the soul has gone. My steps echoed desolately as I came to the ambulatory,

and empty silence fell about me again as I halted in the gloom of the blind chevet.

Virgin and Child in marble hang there ; low on the blank back of the wall that rims the chancel. Two ha'penny tapers, stuck on smeary spikes, held up their frail almonds of pale flame before the lovely drooping face of Mary Mother. For generations that reverted face has been sad ; the sobs uncounted that have gone up before it, the woes of the emptied hearts of myriads of grovelling women, have hung around that face a halo of perpetual melancholy, woven of frustrate hopes and complaints, and the feebleness of human love to assuage. I saddened as I gazed.

Even at that minute a market-wife was coming there to pray ; she faltered up the aisle, and near where I stood in shadow she fell upon her knees. I felt myself eaves-dropper and intruder, but her presence barred my way.

"*Mater Christi, Mater divinæ gratiæ, Mater misericordiæ ;*" the mutter echoed hollow down the empty church. The old wife's face, tanned by seventy years of field labour to the tint of walnut-skin, was furrowed by a lifetime's cares and tears, and some new trouble yet compelled the knotted, creaking knees to touch those stones of prayer. To Mary Mother with the Child on arm this woman lifted eyes tear-blind ; gropingly she reached up to grip the marble fingers, almost to shake them, as in the night of a great sorrow a man may take for solace the hand of his familiar friend.

I fathomed at that moment the secret of the hold which the Church of Rome has upon women ; by sympathy I felt the poignant anthropomorphic appeal the sad figure of Mary makes to her stricken sex. "*Thou* hast been mother ; *Thou* has seen the dying of a son ! O, sad and childless, and woman like to myself, *Thou* knowest my sorrow ; I need not explain !"

I watched the woman's lips, I saw her fondling at the marble hand, I knew her mood, I could enter into her heart, I——

"Dreaming again!" I snapped at myself the next instant. For what should Alain Tanger know of woman's heart? "Remember Lois!" I growled at myself. Woman's heart, forsooth! . . .

But the while I dreamed and philosophised the market-wife was gone, and I was free to pass from gloomy chevet and ambulatory and the ill smell of stale incense and charred wick, into the bright air of the lively market-place. So I moved away; but in the transept I paused again, and shook, and shrank into a nook of shadow. "Remember Lois!" I had grumbled at myself, a minute earlier; and surely this was Lois, who swiftly came towards me, up the nave?

My heart leapt chokily for the moment; but no,—it was Blulette again,—Blulette, of course. The resemblance is so incredibly close; the face is almost the same, the figure is as ripely graceful, the poise and carriage are well-nigh as proud, the two might pass for twin sisters; yet there are distinctions I can draw. The eyes,—in the gloomy church this morning they shone like agates, and I was never sure of the tint in the eyes of Lois. The dress is different, too,—less style in the mode, less restraint in the colour. The hue of the hair seems hardly quite the same, and—most significant of all—the white-tipped lock is missing.

The girl went swiftly past my hiding-place, mounted the step of the ambulatory, and stopped at the spot where the Madonna awaits the worship of her sex. At the shrine of the Virgin Wife I saw the singer kneel; she prayed there, even sobbed; some sorrow tortures this chanteuse into devotion; I watched her in surprise.

For a time the church was silent, but for her murmurings;

then overhead the bell clashed out the hour of ten, and I heard the clank of a scabbard sound along the nave. "Punctual to the minute," thought I, as I watched unseen; for it was Major Filastre Groschaud who came, and Blulette arose at the noise of his approach.

An assignation,—at ten in the morning,—in a church! I smiled and wondered; I was curious about this meeting, though I would have moved out of earshot if I could. But to escape unseen was impracticable, and the sight of me just then might be an unpropitious opening for my business with Groschaud.

I saw him droop his lips to the girl's hand, in almost a courtier's fashion. "Charmed, charmed,—it is good of you to be here," I heard him say; and then he offered her a punctilious arm. With a coquette's laugh she let her hand fall upon his sleeve, and they paced the ambulatory up and down.

They had chosen a most secret place of public rendezvous. The gloom, the low stilted arches, the broad piers, and the inner wall of the ambulatory combined to keep them all but unseen. They talked in tones so low that I could not have overheard them an I would. The half-hour chimed before they parted; the girl passed out at a postern, the scabbard clanked down the nave to the west door.

"Tiens, tiens, as Patrick would say," I said to myself, coming out of my nook the moment the dulled bangs of the padded inner doors assured me that the church was empty of them: "Tiens! now why on earth should the so-famous soldier of France foregather so secretly, so early in the day,—in a church, of all places,—with a café-concert girl?"

That is a puzzle I had not solved an hour later, when I was back at the Rusty Lance; I have hardly solved it yet.

XII

"The pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell."

THAT meeting in the church perplexed me, I say, but I had made a good guess at the puzzle by the time I came down to luncheon. Their secret rendezvous means that Blurette and Groschaud have some intrigue between them of a political as well as an amorous kind. In fact, the chanteuse may be one of the "wine-merchants" whom Flapp wants me to forestall. At any rate I felt I had better deliver the letter the first decent opportunity.

The opportunity came. I had the letter loose in my pocket as I stepped downstairs, and luck was kind to me for once. Just as I crossed the *salle-à-manger*, Groschaud was entering it by the courtyard door. I paused; for the moment we were alone together, in a room that was blinded against the sun; and with no more preface than a bow and a whispered "For you, *mon officier*," I pushed the letter into his hand.

"Attendez! . . . What's this, hey?" he called after me surlily, but I was out in the garden almost before he spoke. And when he came to table the letter was not in his hand; he must have pocketed it unread.

I rose and bowed to him with ultra courtesy, as though we had not met the minute before, and he gave me back a formal bow. We did not speak to each other, and had my right-hand neighbour not been talkative, that would have been for me a silent meal.

To-day my right-hand neighbour was not the porcelain merchant. My friend the porcelain merchant was gone from Brivac, Patrick told me; he had set off, on his automobile so magnifique, nearly three hours before: he would not return to Brivac, he had said. I smiled; I fancy I know a likely cause for his going,—the coldness of heart of the remarkable Bluette. And yet,—a wealthy merchant of Limoges would be a better catch for her than a penniless major of infantry! A strange girl.

My talkative right-hand neighbour to-day has been a padre, the Abbé Ledru. Abbé Ledru began by uttering an apology. "Pardon, M'sieur de Smit," he said,—he has got my travelling name from the register in Madame's bureau, I imagine,—"a thousand pardons, but it is needful that I make a little explication to M'sieur de Smit!"

I bowed, and listened; his explication accounted for the dark presence in my room at the ghostly eve of dawn.

Abbé Ledru suffers from the so-annoying and malsanitary habitude of sleep-walking, it appears; he is that least responsible of offenders, a somnambule. The Abbé had somnambuled encore, he had discovered. Desolated, desolated! he was desolate at the apprehension that he might even have somnambuled into the chamber of M'sieur de Smit! Perhaps M'sieur de Smit could reassure him? *Had* M'sieur de Smit observed a somnambule somnambuling within the so-interesting Number Seven?

"Well,—yes," I said. "I did. I took you for a dream, M'sieur l'Abbé. But it matters nothing,—oh, it matters just nothing at all."

But yes, it did,—a thousand *thousand* pardons, it so mattered. M'sieur de Smit would confer a personal boon on the Abbé if M'sieur de Smit would carefully lock his door of a night. M'sieur de Smit was not himself a

somnambule, perhaps? Ah, that was fortunate; this somnambulous habitude was the penance and trial of the Abbé's life, it was a weapon of the Evil One against the Abbé, it came as the result of terrible macerations and vigils which the Abbé's anxiety for his soul had caused his body to undergo.

"It is one of the mysteries so-profound of life, M'sieur," the Abbé ruminated aloud, "how the spiritual may damage the physical. But then, the physical so often damages the spiritual, is it not?" he smiled. "And truly, it is better to somnambule than to fall into sin."

While he homilised I was studying him inquisitively. He does not look the saint or anchorite. He steadily eats and drinks down the long bill of fare. He is not the attenuate, angular, acerb type of priest, any more than the paunchy and pimply "abbot purple as his vines." He is tall and strong; the outlines of his soutane betray muscle more than fat; the broad brim of his furry black head-gear sits low on a face that speaks more worldly vigour of mind than spiritual unction. He has small reddish eyes and a tight mouth: his frequent smile draws a map of wrinkles over his countenance: he is a priest, but I can hardly imagine him serving the Mass.

He may have guessed my thoughts, for he told me that his health was not what it seemed. It was his health that had brought him to Brivac, he said. For the pilgrimage; it was a vow. "M'sieur also, without doubt?" he queried, with his eyes keen upon me. "M'sieur is a good Catholic, I perceive?"

"What makes you think so?" said I.

Oh, it was singular that an Englishman should come to Brivac, unless for the pilgrimage to Duramadour; moreover, had he not seen M'sieur de Smit enter the church this morning,—as he hoped, to pray?

A particularly observant priest, this Abbé Ledru ; it was on my lips to ask him if he hadn't also seen two other good Catholics, a soldier and a singer, enter the church, doubtless to pray? But I held my tongue as to that, though my glance shifted leftward to Groschaud.

The silent Major was picking his teeth at the moment, and my glance may have seemed a reproach. He rose with a grudging bow and a grunted bon-jour, and made for the garden-gate. He would go to his quarters to read Flapp's letter in privacy, I was sure.

The Abbé also appeared to have finished his meal, though the fruit taken on to his plate lay untouched. For rapidly he made the sign of the cross on his breast, said "Gratia!" scraped back his chair, rose, bowed, and followed the Major. One by one the other guests drifted off to the cafés in search of a happy digestion ; and presently I was under the berceau alone.

"I wonder if they're in league, those two?" I mused ; the Abbé's prompt departure on the Major's heels suggested it. . . . "A very observant priest indeed ; in appearance not at all the sleep-walker. Now, if it had been I who somnambuled——"

I lit a cigar, and that was a signal to Patrick. In a whisk a cup of black coffee steamed under my nose, and then, with a patronising look of friendship, the kind of pitying gaze that one gives to the harmless demented, Pat stood at ease for conversation, his napkin, big enough for a bachelor's tablecloth, draped banner-like on his left arm.

"Tell me, then, Pat asthore," said I. "Who the deuce is the Abbé Ledru?"

Pat spat. "Saperlipopette ! it is a priest," he said. "Also a pilgrim. From Rheims." Fine shades of contempt inflected his voice.

"You like not priests and pilgrims, mon ami?"

"Parbleu! I like not one who rests at the Lance two weeks and gives not a garçon a sou!"

"Been here a fortnight, has he?"

"But certainly, M'sieur milor'; and what I of myself demand all the time is, why for rests he at the Lance? Tenez, the Lance it is costly, an hotel of eight francs the day. Why rests he not at a place of four francs,—by example, at the High Mother, of Duramadour? Is it not the place for a priest, the hotel of the High Mother of God, parbleu?"

"I fear you're not a good Catholic, my exile of Erin."

But yes indeed: simply he did not practise it much, he grinned.

"Beware of purgatory, Pat." I shook a finger at him. "But tell me, then,—who is . . . who is . . . Made-moiselle Blurette?"

I wish I could paint Pat's face as it beamed upon me the next instant. Admiration for Blurette's beauty leered through his contempt for her profession; jocular suspicion of my motive spoke in the slow droop of his eye; enlightenment as to the cause of my presence in Brivac suddenly unwrinkled his brow. He laughed, a slow, gurgling laugh.

"Tiens, tiens!" he said, "the so-tempting Blurette! Tiens, M'sieur is of good taste, yes. Certainly, why not? One is not made of wood. But," he gazed at me pityingly, "it is hopeless, M'sieur milor'. She is straight, of a straightness abominable. Sage as a stone image, the little Blurette. Nothing,—nothing." He flicked the mourning-border of his thumbnail against his teeth. "Not that much,—nothing," he added, with the words and gesture of my china-merchant last night.

"But why not, my Eily Mavourneen? Why not, my Pat the Shaughraun?"

"My poor good M'sieur milor'," he said pityingly, "she is as the ice that cools the wine. Pristi!" he went on, almost angrily, "who ever heard of a chanteuse that kept herself sage? It is unnatural, never has it happened before! But so it is, malheureusement! Nothing to do, M'sieur, unless,—but doubtless M'sieur is wed?"

I winced. "Why should you think so?" I growled.

"Bluette, she requires that one shall take her before the Maire with his scarf on,—to hear the article of the Code."

"Absurd!" said I. "You don't mean *that*?"

"But so it is, M'sieur. Sapristi! all the big bonnets of Brivac, the Messieurs with much money and stomach, have they not made her their court? Une jeune demoiselle qui restait sourde et rebelle," he hummed. "It is her own song, M'sieur."

"I've heard it; she sings it better than you do, my poor Pat. But you dishearten me, you fill my heart with tears. No chance? Nobody! Not even the brave Major Groschaud?"

"Saperlipopette, no! not even the brav' Major himself."

"Then there can be no hope for poor me," I said, with a tremendous sigh, keeping my eyes on his face.

Pat smiled, he grinned, and he patted my shoulder encouragingly. "But let M'sieur essay," he said. "M'sieur is an Angliche, M'sieur is a milor', M'sieur is rich and beau. oh yes, let M'sieur essay. My faith, time that somebody tamed her, the proud Saint Touch-me-not so stuck-up!"

"Then how can I get some talk with her, arrah?"

"But it is easy, quite easy,—always at four hours on the terrace, M'sieur milor.' M'sieur goes to the terrace this afternoon, and he finds her there, to talk. Oh, it is quite simple, M'sieur."

"Why not?" I said, and went upstairs for a siesta, assured that every inquisitive ear in the town would learn how the Englishman had been drawn to Brivac by the beautiful eyes of Blulette.

"Rather a stroke of policy, that," I thought ; but I hardly think it now.

XIII

“Home, no more home to me, whither must I wander!”

ALL Brivac siestas on summer afternoons. It is not a far cry to Spain, and the sun is brazen and flaring. The sky seems yellow velvet,—the atmosphere flame and powder,—you affront the downpour of dusty white heat at your peril, there. The wise are cowards of afternoon sunshine at Brivac, and behind shut shutters and dropped jealousies the sleep of the wise is sonorous with snores. This afternoon I napped myself.

Madame was still asleep, amidst her books and files and billheads, when I descended,—I saw the rhythm of her bodice as I passed the bureau-door; and Pat himself was deliciously asleep in the shady *salle-à-manger* on three chairs. Yet the air was cooling a little: there was just the ghost of a shiver in the platane leaves that dapple with shadow the boulevard road; between the Lance and the Square I met as many as three people; and there were figures on the terrace of the Café itself.

But that was little wonder, perhaps; the Café faces north-eastward, so that it freshens in its own afternoon shadow. I had not meant to visit it again so soon: I was out to air and cool myself beside the river, that swirls under the bridge and chatters past the washing-shed, and slides away into fishy pools below grey dipping fingers of willow. But the Café tempted me, an awning gives its terrace double shade, the wisteria-vine upon it showed silver cool:

already I was perspiring, and the river lay beyond a desert of blinding gravel. Blinkingly I came up the four steps that lead to the terrace of the Café, and had to sink upon a chair at once, and mop and mop again my brow. A twitter of laughter sounded near me, and I turned my head,

Two women were merry over their needles, at the end of the terrace where the shade was densest. One was the plump young Widow Bonami who keeps the Café: she had thrown her head back in her laughter, until her hair almost touched a placard on the wall; the placard informed the world that the Café of the Comedy supplies "Consumations of the premier choice." Madame Bonami smiled at me, but the other held her face low over her stitching, as I sauntered down the terrace.

"You are merry, my dames," I said, engagingly. "But it is cruel of you,—to laugh at a poor Englishman who suffers from your terrible sun."

"But no, M'sieur,—one is not so mal-polished as that!" the Widow protested. "It was just a little jest of mine, behold all!"

"As what?" said I.

"My faith, Mademoiselle who said that never should she marry a man! Parbleu! then, say I,—she shall marry a boy, that is all!" That was all, and yet the plump fair widow rollicked in her laugh.

"Permit that I seat myself at your table, Madame. . . . Permit, M'am'selle?"

I got no reply from Blurette, her downbent face was turned from me; but Madame was very willing.

"Have the goodness, Madame, to serve the coolest of your consumations of the premier choice."

"Bien, M'sieur," and the next moment Blurette and I were left alone.

She lifted her head, and she eyed me almost defiantly. Her beauty was suffused with just the dark carnation that ripens on the sunward curve of a hanging peach; and memory flashed upon me the picture of that swift angry blush with which Lois Amaury heard my overture of marriage.

"My god, you *are* my wife!"

I had sprung to my feet, with a clutch at the table between us. The work-basket slid, turned over, and emptied itself to the floor.

Terror at my vehemence, and puzzlement at my incomprehensible English words, spoke in her eyes. But she stooped, picked up the spools and scissors and needle-case, and packed them neatly in the basket again, before she spoke with her voice.

Then, "M'sieur says?" she inquired. "I comprehend not. . . . M'sieur will heat himself again. Is it weather to make oneself energetic? My faith, no!"

She spoke in the purest of French, word and accent perfect; she *looked* French; she fronted me calmly; if any emotion stirred her, it was that of pitying surprise. The likeness had fooled me again.

I muttered apology. "But you are so exceedingly alike," I said in her own language.

"Like whom, M'sieur?" Her voice was steady, her eyelids did not flutter, there was compassion for the known madness of all Englishmen in her tone.

"Like my,—like a friend," I said, gloomily. "What an ass I am!" I was thinking,—and yet—

"Ah, I comprehend,—M'sieur comes to have an hallucination! M'sieur mistakes me for someone. It is, perhaps, that M'sieur has seen me at the concerts of Paris,—I am of the Scala and the Cigale," she proudly said.

. . . No, the face is not quite the same,—the figure is

perhaps a thought thinner, the dress is more emphatic,—not a trace of white in her hair,—true Frenchwoman, every inch,—the real French style,—ah, and even the French “grand air,” my Jove!—the “air noble!” . . . That is what I was thinking while she spoke.

Yet the likeness is perfectly astounding. Only one thing can account for it ; I put the question.

“Ma’am’selle ?”

“M’sieur ?”

“Haven’t you a sister,—a twin-sister, may be,—almost exactly like yourself? Does she know a Monsieur Goss !”

She blushed while she denied it. She denied it faintly. I doubt her denial. A sister she may have, of whom she is ashamed. “Is it that M’sieur has met somebody . . . who might be my sister ?” she stammered at last.

“Oh no,” I said. “I don’t think so,—only mere fancy,—you are so like someone I once knew. But *she* could not be your sister, of course.”

“Why not ?” she asked, almost offendedly ; a bundle of inconsistencies, this girl.

“Because,—because she—is not of your monde.”

“Ah !” She gave what I thought was a breath of relief, and bent to her stitching again. And again the curve of her neck and shoulder suggested Lois.

“Yet I don’t know,” I muttered, in English. It is strange that English words should have come to my lips just then,—as a rule one thinks in French in France ; matter of habit. “She may have a sister without knowing it.”

“M’sieur says ?” she enquired, with a catch in her breath.

“Oh, just nothing, Ma’am’selle.”

“If M’sieur would always speak French,” she said. “M’sieur speaks it well,” she flattered. “Doubtless M’sieur travels much in France? M’sieur likes Brivac? Stays M’sieur here for long?”

"Charmed with Brivac,—charmed," I told her, evasively. "But you, Ma'am'selle,—why are *you* in Brivac?"

"But,—is it not evident why? To sing. To get money."

"This is not La Scala," I said, looking into the Café. "This is not even La Cigale."

She smiled a little. "It is summer now. In summer one must sing out of Paris,—to live."

"So excellent a singer as you, in so small a town?" I queried. "Why not Trouville? Why not Aix-les-Bains?"

She smiled again, rather wistfully. "Ah! yes, but M'sieur cannot understand how difficult,—one must take what one can,—the agents. . . ."

Her tone was so sweet and her manner so fine that I felt a stir of pity. "Mon dieu, Ma'am'selle," I began, "either here or anywhere, how can you——"

But I boggled in the middle of that question: it was so personal. She lifted her eyes listeningly.

"M'sieur says?"

"I mean, how—how can *you* be a café-concert singer at all,—so refined and gentle,—so good, I am sure,—so high of birth?"

"Ah! no," she said sadly. "M'sieur flatters. M'sieur mistakes me again. M'sieur must remember that it is my poor little business to seem . . . refined."

"My faith! I do *not* mistake,—it sees itself at once, I am sure of it," I insisted. "*You* to be singing—at Brivac,—for sous!"

Her lip had the shadow of a quiver. "One must live, M'sieur. One takes that which one gets,—of the agents. I do what I can."

"But Ma'am'selle has parents?"

"Ah! no, M'sieur: no home, no mother, nor . . . no father," she trembled.

"Nor husband?" I said, lightly. I meant it innocently, but the girl is touchy. It angered her: she flamed.

"Finish, then! Finish! Nor lover? That is what you mean!" she almost sobbed.

"It—it was a little jest," I said, apoloisingly.

"M'sieur jests, but he insults, all the same."

"But,—my dear Ma'am'selle, not I,—not I, indeed," I protested. "I do not even hint at such a thing,—I am sure that you are straight and good. It is only that I wonder to find you *here*."

"Ah! it is the old song,—always I hear it the same," she petulantly said. "The Major says it, too. . . . And why not here? Can't any girl keep honest in a café-chantant, then? . . . A chanteuse, always and infallibly must she exist for the gay Messieurs?"

Her voice had dropped into sternness, and my eyes fell before the flash in hers. A most uncomfortable girl. "Mon dieu, Ma'am'selle," I began weakly, but she stormed an interruption.

"Parbleu! one cannot believe,—one cannot a moment suppose,—it is not possible,—that a chanteuse can keep straight, can be loyal to herself! The Messieurs, they are so fascinating and handsome, so witty, so rich? . . . A poor girl cannot but yield?"

Her tirade began in bitterness, but ended on the brink of tears. I was silenced, but my heart stirred generously; I showed no offence, and the next minute she went on.

"Tenez, M'sieur. Do not take evil thoughts of Blulette. . . . I am here, it is true,—I sing for sous,—in a café,—at Brivac. . . . But it is, alas! that I am lonely in the world. . . . I have to organise my life to the best I can. Life is hard for a girl. . . . I am not a chanteuse for the pleasure!"

She was speaking now with all the suave, clear, sweet

speech of amiable Frenchwomen, and tears were in her eyes. Beautiful, good, refined, tender,—ah ! if she *were* Lois, and not her lovely counterfeit !

She was flashing her beauty full upon me. I saw a face to break a heart for, a picture-countenance, aureoled and lit

“With brown hair curled like breakers of the sea,
And great eyes set so strangely in the face
That all things else are nothing suddenly !”

“*Lois !* if you were *really* Lois !” I began, but broke off, with what seemed a choky thumping of heart against lung. For her face had quickly paled, tears mantled there, and again I was sure that Lois she truly was !

Yet the fleet impression passed with her words. “I weep at what you say, M’sieur. . . . You have reason, I was not born to be this. Ah ! I have a hard duty,—my father, he could not think that I should need to do this !”

Back I leaned in my chair and fanned myself with my hat ; agitation and heat had come upon me, I was almost breathless, I could not understand my emotion. But luckily up at that moment came Madame Bonami with a tray.

“I am slow, I am long, but my lazy garçons, they sleep,” she explained, as she poured my consumption of the premier choice.

There was only one glass on the tray. “But how, then ?” I stammered. “Glasses for Ma’am’selle and yourself, Madame !”

“Very honoured, M’sieur,—for me,” the café-keeper smiled. “But,—*ma mignonne* ?” she turned to Bluettes.—It is that Ma’am’selle—— ?”

“I shall thank M’sieur all the same,” Bluettes said icily. “But I shall not accept ; I do not, never.”

"It is such a strange *mignonne*," the Widow explained. "Not a consumation, not a flower, will she accept ever. For a chanteuse it is such a strange chanteuse! *Tenez*, M'sieur will think it incredible, but never will she the loose songs sing, nor the tight dress wear, nor the low neck, oh no! But there! that is good, for the Café of the Comedy. The Café of the Comedy is not a beuglant, no." Contempt for all beuglants spoke in the Widow Bonami's voice. "This is the chic café,—the officers' café, not a beuglant on the boulevard! Come you this evening, M'sieur, you shall not repent it. Incredible how much of the world comes to hear the songs of Ma'am'selle! Look you, Messieurs the officers also."

The iron shoe of a scabbard rang on the steps of the terrace as she ended, and I saw the laced cap of Filastre Groschaud shine golden against the green of a laurel-bush on the parapet. We spied each other at the same moment, he and I; and my presence at Bluette's table, in that privileged corner of the terrace, shocked him into a pause. His foot hung undecided; under the huge poke of his cap his smile of anticipation hardened into a scowl. For a full minute he paused there, silent and awkward, then turned abruptly, without a bow, and strode off into the sunburnt Square; and in the silence that fell we heard from the riverside the women's battoirs echo with musical repercussion,—omens, perhaps, of blows to come.

I looked at Bluette, but her eyes were on her deft swift needle. I eyed Madame Bonami, and the plump rosy widow shot a look half-troubled, half-mirthful, at me.

"The brav' Major, he does not love the English too well," she explained. "For the moment, the brav' Major is offended. He likes not M'sieur to be here,—he is jealous!" she said, with a jolly laugh.

But, "Nonsense, nonsense!" said I, annoyed; for

Bluette sat stitching calmly, and her calmness was strangely vexing. "Nonsense, he goes to the public garden, to be cool."

The Major was striding along in his own shadow, towards the lime-trees that hedge the Square from the riverside acre of grass and flower-plot. A martial figure he looked as he went. The statue of a famous soldier rose in his path, I saw his hand go to the salute as he passed that effigy of the dashing young Marceau. Then the gold lace flashed; he had turned his head for a side-glance at the terrace; I took that glance for a beckoning hint.

"I go to make friends with the Major," I said as I dropped a franc on the table. "Madam,—Ma'am'selle!" and I bowed myself out upon the dazzle of the Square.

XIV

"The best thing I know of between France and England is the sea."

THE famous Groschaud I judge to be a man of forty : perhaps a little less, for a Frenchman tends to look older than his age. He is soldier every inch, but his air is not distinguished, and an English crack regiment would think him short and girthy. His nose is prominent and hooked, eyes of the tint and glint of steel frown out under bristly eyebrows, the inner line of his lips is hard and straight, he has grizzled brush-like moustaches and plush-like hair, pepper-and-salt. A ranker, of course, with no fortune but his sword. That is why Flapp feels sure he can buy him.

This is the man who gave us so much bother in Siam, who forestalled us there, outwitted us awhile, and brought the khaki Tommies and the red-legged piou-pious to the very verge of battle. The Republic recalled him in the notch of time, and carefully sent him into obscurity at the sixth-rate military post of Brivac. He bears the exile ill.

To look at the man is to respect him and rather dislike him ; he is not amiable. He seems to own the latent force of a coiled spring, gathered up for the outleap. A light burns within him, some fanatical idea possesses him, I think he pores upon France's great past and decadent present, and dreams of a glorious resurrection for the

tricolour flag. And this is the man whom the egregious Flapp has sent me to Brivac to buy!

I found the man in the public garden, near the path that edges the river. He was expecting me, I feel sure. The garden was empty, but for ourselves. He had chosen his seat strategically, bushes screened the bench, and only the glow of his stripes and stars picked him out to the eye. His folded arms were propped by his sword-hilt, and his chin was resting on his wrists. It was quite a pose imposing, and I misinterpreted his truculent attitude; I gave it a military motive. Nothing of the kind,—the man is simply in love.

I must be a good deal the Englishman, after all, to have boarded that soured and almost tragical fellow in a manner so blunt and point-blank. And yet it was the best way, perhaps; fine words will never butter *his* parsnips; he would have flouted me had I fawned. So I did not even lift my hat; in the most matter-of-fact way I said, "You've read the letter, I suppose?"

A movement of his head suggested the seat beside him. I took the hint, and while he blankly stared at the empty band-stand opposite, I lit a cigarette. I did not offer him one, and I must have puffed a dozen silent whiffs before he spoke or stirred. Then he swivelled around at me, his arms on his sword-hilt, his chin on his arms, and his eyes boring into me at close quarters.

"You have the notes?" he growled.

I was disappointed with him for that. But I nodded; I pressed my hand on my waistcoat; the rustle may have been audible to him.

His eyes, that glowed with a brooding rancour, came nearer to mine. "You think I shall take them, hein?"

"My faith, how can I tell? I do not know,—and it

matters not a sou to me. I am messenger only, M'sieur,—I do not care a centime, yes or no."

He spat upon the gravel; I sat and whiffed my cigarette.

Then he changed his posture, laying his sword in its scabbard across his knees, and rolling it over and over while he spoke.

"I shall have to have a quarrel with you, Englishman," he growled.

"Because I *am* an Englishman, I suppose. Well, I rather expected that."

"No, no!" he snapped, dropping his taciturnity, "you talk the folly of fools. Is it, then, that I hate *all* the English? But no, I do not. . . . Fools think that I do, but no! . . . I respect the English. I have camped with them, I have got ready to fight them, and then,—under orders, morbleu!"—he tore at his moustache and ground the words between his teeth, . . . "under orders I have—yielded to them,—sacredie!"

Silently I puffed at my cigarette, and presently he gave a growling kind of laugh. "You are true English," he said. "Calm, calm! The English are all right, in their place. Why should I hate them? But no,—it is your country I hate,—your Albion perfidious,—your India that was ours,—your Burmah that was—*mine*." His tone was almost wolfish just then. "And your St. Helena, that killed our greatest. . . . Ah, I curse your England for it, that!" and indeed the very intensity of hate was in his voice.

But I maintained the phlegmatic. I smoked. "The fortune of war," I said. "Somebody must win, M'sieur,—somebody has to lose." He was hardly listening.

"Nom de nom de *Nom*!" he swore. "Here, at this spot—" he dug his scabbard into the gravel,—“your

Vilainton has been,—all alone. No squadron, no guard. . . And the cowards let him safe to Paris."

"I know," I said. "I read about it at the Lance. He was a brave man, M'sieur; like you. He rode across France, almost alone, time of war. What then? Would you have had Brivac murder him?"

"Thunder of the sky, no!" He was thundering himself. "But I would have had them take him back to Spain, yes! It was his impudence, to ride across France, without a squadron!"

"He trusted French honour," said I.

"It was not that,—it was *not* that! It was his contempt, his insolence. . . . You English are all like that. Always you travel about France like that! That is why we love you so," he added, with a toothy smile.

"We pay our way."

"Ah yes,—you think you buy us, with your twenty-five franc louis, you think your money makes you masters,—you think you can buy me, *me*! . . . But I have a quarrel with you, a quarrel! . . . Morbleu, comprehend you not?" he went on, as I sat silent. "A quarrel, *a quarrel*,—don't you understand?"

I stiffened my back. "You mean a duel, eh? Want to pot me or spit me?"

"Is it that you will not fight the duel?" he said, contemptuously. "You will fight only the box-fight, your English box-fight of brutes?"

His tone was stinging. "My faith!" I said, "I daresay I could stand up with a pistol pretty calm. But give me a reason for it first. You want a duel. Why for? Because I brought you a letter?"

"Ah no, morbleu!" he snapped. "It is not that,—you are only an agent, a *commis-voyageur*," he said, contemptuously. "Another time I might listen to your business,

. . . Look you, I am pulled all ways, every side but one. Everybody makes up to me for that,—except the Republic.”

“How do you mean?”

“Morableu, it appears that if I, Filastre Groschaud, will draw my sword,—only just draw it,—then the King shall be crowned at Rheims and make me a Duc,—or the Empereur shall reign at Fontainebleau, and make me a Marshal,—or Déroulède, he shall be President of a Catholic Republic and make me Minister of War! See how it is all tempting, . . . for poor Filastre Groschaud!”

“I see,” said I. “It is.”

“Peste!” he resumed, for the talkative Southerner in him was unmuzzled. “What honours, what riches for Filastre Groschaud, if he will only break his oath to the Republic! . . . He is poor, he is hidden away, dishonoured; he has been prisoner to the English, and the rich men they tempt him, yes,—and you,—*you*,—an Englishman, morbleu! *You* offer your dirty twenty thousand of francs!”

This man makes me feel small. Dirty they are, those notes from the mulatto’s paw: my hands also are black with them. . . .

“I’m deuced ashamed of myself, Major,” I said, getting up and stamping about, “I never saw it before,—of course, it’s abominable,—and I’m a fool,—and half a knave! . . . You’re honest, and I’m a sneak,—that’s about the measure of it. . . . I’m deuced ashamed, and I ask your pardon. No wonder you’re anxious to ventilate my skin!”

“Oh, it is not that,” he said. “I do not quarrel for that. You are a messenger only, that is all. . . . I lean to the new Bonapartists, I should like to help them,—and it would be so easy, that!”

“As how?” said I.

“See you, at a banquet I,—Filastre Groschaud,—well-

known"—he held up his head,—“I make a speech unexpected. I nominate for President the Prince-General—for *President*, mind you, not for Emperor.”

“Like Louis Napoleon the First,” I said.

“Yes, and like the great Bonaparte for Consul. . . . See you, in France it is but a step from the chair to the throne.”

“A coup d’État, then?”

“What you will,—what you will, morbleu! I have the plan all ready. . . . I am Bonapartist at the soul, like all French officers, but——” He paused.

“Why not, then?” said I, in a faint attempt to keep my word to Flapp.

The Major’s voice, that had so far been growly, now softened and became almost emotional. . . . “There is something more strong with me now—I cannot,—I am changed,—I am spoiled,—there is something draws me another way.”

“Which way, Major?”

He made no reply.

“The Royalist way,—Legitimist-Orléanist,—the Déroutède way,—or is it the way of the priests?”

“Name of a thunder, leave me tranquil!” he growled. “You Englishman with your questions! . . . But this I will say,” and he looked at me fixedly,—“I will not have you stopping at Brivac, *making love to Ma’am’selle Blurette!*”

I laughed in his face,—the wisest thing to do. “Pot me and welcome, if I do,” I said. “If I do I’ll fight you the duel-fight, my dear Monsieur.”

“But you follow her to Brivac?” he growled.

“My dear Monsieur, I never saw her before last night.”

“On your oath?”

"On my word. And how, then? Can't a man admire a pretty chanteuse without making love to her, Major?"

"Not in France," he said. "France is a land of amour. Here one is gallant and warm. . . . Tenez, M'sieur, I shall to you speak frankly. Bluettes, she is not a common singing-girl; Bluettes, she is worthy of a brave man's love, for the good motive . . . I wish to marry her, I. . . . Maybe I cannot, maybe she will not,—but morbleu! nobody else at Brivac shall! . . . And you shall not insult her, pardie!"

"You are right,—I certainly shall not."

"But see you, I will not have you offer her in marriage, Englishman! She is for me;" he tapped his breast,—“for me, Filastre Groschaud, if for any. . . . Tenez, Englishman, I will tell you this, I have for her one of those passions which grow not on every tree. . . . See you, I have been like a hermit with women, but . . . M'sieur, I shall firmly ask you to neglect Ma'am'selle; you shall neglect her; for look you, I *love* her,—*love* her!"

His tone became exalted. "She controls me, she might order the impossible and yet I should try. . . . Yes, if she said, 'Be Pope!' to me, I should try it, morbleu."

"Turally,—quite naturally," I said, with some disdain for his Frenchy hyperbole.

"Ah well, I you warn,—I will not have you make to her love."

I laughed in his face again. "Ah, let me laugh,—leave me tranquil,—I do not make love to anybody, me."

"Yet I find you with her, close, on the terrace?"

"My faith!" I said. "Don't you see I must seem to have some excuse for being in Brivac?"

That argument appeared to shake him a little. He pulled at his moustache, bent the stiff hairs into his mouth

and bit them, regarded me reflectively, and frowned his eyebrows together till they touched and brushed. Then, "You're sure you don't seek the love of Blurette?"

"Not I, my parole! I've got a Blurette of my own."

"Where?" he demanded. "Where is she?"

"Somewhere," I winced.

"Then go you back to her, straight. . . . Tenez, I give you good advice, M'sieur. It is not safe for you here in Brivac. Brivac is a whispering-gallery, it is full of spies. Go back to your dame, quick!"

I winced again. "Must finish my business first."

"It is finished," he said.

"You won't accept? You won't answer the letter?"

"But yes, but yes,—one is not so impolite as all that. I shall write,—I shall acknowledge reception, naturally."

"Then you accept his offer?"

"Morableu! I refuse."

"Then I can go away at once?" I said; and I sat and wondered why I should feel so unready to go.

"Almost" he said. "But hush! a whispering-gallery, said I not? Attend, some one comes! . . . Tenez, tomorrow I go to the pilgrimage," he muttered. "Go you too,—the letter——"

Abruptly he rose, and sauntered down the path as though he was casually passing my bench that minute; and I sat watching a black figure approach. The black of it showed almost violet against the green and gold of the sunlit trees. "An omen, maybe," I thought.—"He'll wear the black and violet of a bishop some day, perhaps." For the newcomer was the Reverend Ledru.

Smilingly he approached me, using a red pocket-handkerchief and swinging the bunchy blue umbrella which he had shut when he came into shade. He smiled and smirked, he was bent on a talk with me, no doubt; but

I had risen, and with a salutation only I passed him and went out upon the Square.

The Square was cooling, the light upon it was reddening, a breath from the hills beyond the river had begun to stir. The Square was a scene of battle; school was over and the children were at blows. The eternal wrangle between lay-school and clerical-school was in full swing.

“Chez les laïques
On a des coliques,
Mais chez les Sœurs
On a des douceurs.”

the little clerics were singing. The little laics seemed to be getting the worst of it, and I walked to the Lance, thinking upon the strange recrudescence of the power of the Church in France. “Things look bad for the Republic,” I mused. “Now I wonder what Blulette is tempting the man to do?”

There was no Blulette on the terrace as I passed.

XV

"Then fly betimes, for only they
Conquer Love who run away."

A CHAIN of queer little incidents linked, this first day of mine at Brivac. Groschaud is right about the place being a whispering-gallery. I begin to find myself netted in a web of small intrigues, and I have come upon another incongruity in the doings and character of Blulette.

I went upstairs a little before half-past six this evening, to change my coat. That done, and the dinner-bell still tarrying,—for punctuality is almost a vice at Brivac,—I stood at my window to take the air. My window lets me out on a railed little balcony that it has all to itself, upon the garden-front of the Lance.

Raised at the height of the inn's upper storey I could see, away to the right, the grounds of the convent, beyond the eager brook and the sombre wall. The grounds of the convent are bosky, because the nuns must have seclusion from prying eyes. And suddenly I felt myself to be Peeping Tom when in those grounds amidst the shrubberies a moving patch of sanguine took my eye.

That patch of red was the cape and hood of a nun, —an elder nun; Abbess, or Mother-Superior, or some such titular she must be, for she treads like a dowager-queen. She is portly and tall, and regally wears the

splendid garb of her Order, a dress devised to symbolise "the water and the blood from the wounded side that flowed." The robe is greyish-white, the hood and cape are crimson, and the effect is gorgeous, of course. I could not but regard it.

Within the blood-red rim of the cowl I could see the Mother-nun's face: it is the firm, clear countenance of a woman nobly born and grown up in the exercise of authority. I watched her with admiration; but I got a shock of positive dread when I saw another figure come hurrying along the path. For surely this was Lois Amaury Tanger! Figure, gait, a green dress,—it *must* be Lois! . . .

Yet no; Blulette again, confound her! Stupid and angering, this continual mistake; I must use myself to the likeness. But why in the name of common-sense should a café songster be walking with a noble Abbess, in the grounds of a Convent of the Holy Blood? . . .

I saw the Abbess smile upon Blulette, touch her hair, caress her shoulder, even kiss her cheek! And the girl was weeping, pouring out words, confessing something, that was plain; the nun was mothering her, and they bore themselves almost as equals together, "A perfectly amazing, eye-opening, quite astounding Blulette!" my mind exclaimed, "What next?"

Abbé Ledru was next. "It surprises M'sieur de Smit?" his voice said, quite near me. I turned my head. The Abbé also was taking the air before dinner; he stood within the balcony of Number Eight.

Quizzically he regarded me. "Monsieur wonders at what he sees down there?"

I nodded.

"It is nothing, M'sieur; nothing remarkable, that."

"I should have thought it was, do you know?"

"Oh no," he smiled. "The servants of Holy Church

cannot be fastidious. . . . Besides, the girl is straight. The good Mother-Superior will have sent for her, desiring to encourage her in the straight path. . . . See how the poor girl weeps. The Mother-Superior counsels her. Advising her to the penance,—to the pilgrimage to-morrow, without doubt.” The Abbé was speaking in a discreet and honeyed little voice, that could not be overheard.

Before I could find a fit reply the ring of the dinner-bell began. “M’sieur descends, is it not?” the hungry Abbé said, and next instant the balcony of Number Eight was empty.

The Abbé was gone, but I stood on, staring down into the convent garden. I saw the glister of tears in Blulette’s eyes, I saw the stately Mother kiss her again; and then I remembered that I was prying, and in a flurry I shrank into my room. The dinner-call was gonging yet; I had not long offended.

Discomfortably I took my place at table. On my left sat Groschaud, and I hardly knew how to bear myself to him, our afternoon talk remembered. The other side me sat the ubiquitous Abbé, the priest who manages to see all the secret things I see. He embodies the stealthy surveillance which we English have it in our very bones to hate. Some old unhappy far-off legacy from Lollard times must have stirred in me just then, for suddenly I had the sensation of being caught in a Jesuit toil, compromised and imperilled in all these happenings at Brivac; and I felt that,—that moment almost,—I must break away. . . .

I record that sensation because, when it is passed, my mind went on to analyse its causes. There sat the mutely threatening soldier, grumpy and grim; there sat the inquisitorial, omnipresent priest. Blulette was herself a mystery, I was becoming obsessed by her, I could not keep my thoughts from her; I——

But Patrick touched my elbow, whispering indulgently ; my musings were keeping the table below me waiting for snails. The Abbé had been speaking to me, Pat said, and I had to turn with an apology.

"Ah, it was nothing, nothing !" came in the Abbé's blandest tones. "Merely that I was saying how M'sieur de Smit would enjoy the visit to Duramadour, should he go to-morrow. To-morrow is the grand day, M'sieur,—Brother Saturnin, he is to preach to-morrow. Brother Saturnin is famous, he is eloquent and compelling. The pilgrimage would interest M'sieur de Smit,—would it not, M'sieur the Major, would it not ?"

Groschaud assented in a grunt.

"Maybe M'sieur the Major himself makes the pilgrimage to-morrow ?" the priest suavely asked.

The Major nodded.

"The train departs at seven hours, is it not ?"

Groschaud shrugged irritably. "My faith, I know not. . . . Daubiac, knowest thou ?"

Captain-Treasurer Daubiac made the priest a little bow. "But yes, mon père,—at seven hours just," he said.

"At seven hours ? It is early, that. But I certainly go," I said, with my eye on the Major. "Why else should I come to Brivac ?"

"Naturally ; why else ?" the Abbé gravely echoed, and then went on with his dinner.

I showed myself too clever in that question ; but he also, by taking me up, had given himself away. I am pretty sure that he is one of the "wine-merchants" nibbling at Groschaud ; and no doubt he suspects me of designs of the kind myself. . . . But I am done with the wine-trade from to-morrow. My career as a Bonapartist agent has been brief and unsuccessful ; I make a better courier

than a spy. I resign the office,—I made up my mind to resign it this evening. Let me say why.

After I finished dining I sat under the *berceau*, thinking it all over, for an hour, and then I went out into a world of moonlight, wonderfully blanched. The shadows were lilac and grey, the night was lucent, ambient, mellifluous, the air was honeyed like a sweet wine. It was good to be alive in Brivac this evening, sheer pleasure merely to live and breathe and have one's being under that sky of brilliancy and ease. And yet I will not stay in Brivac long.

I am uncomfortable in the presence of Groschaud. I gave him insult,—I did it for money, currishly. And the benefits of Bonapartism for France do not show so plainly now as they did in the Paris train. It's a dirty job, this pulling chestnuts out of the coals for Flapp. . . .

Then there's Blulette. I vowed to myself after dinner that I would avoid the girl, and yet I found myself at the Café of the Comedy again after all. The girl is tempting and dangerous: the very mystery about her lends her charm. I went and skulked in the shadow under the terrace, standing in the Square and listening for her voice. When it came, it was a sad old ballad she sang, of browning fields and leafless forests and dead joys:

"Nous n'irons plus aux bois,
Les lauriers sont coupés."

Upon my word, it sounded like a knell.

Yet I had to force myself away from the place; I positively wanted to mount to the terrace. "She'll be looking for me," I thought, confound me for an ass! "She'll wonder why I'm not present to hear her!" I told myself, actually I did!

I had to force myself away, I say. Time to clear out of Brivac, that is plain.

"M'sieur milor' retires so early?" said Pat, as he brought me my candle. "Desires M'sieur anything? *What? More cold buckets of water?*"

"It is for the morning,—for the morning early," I said. "I part for the pilgrimage,—at seven hours."

He was coming up the steps beside me, and he suddenly stopped to stare. His shrug conveyed astonishment and pity. "M'sieur is, then, at Brivac as a pilgrim?" he said, disappointedly. "*Not* for the so-tempting Blulette?" I saw myself descend a dozen rungs on the ladder of Pat's esteem.

"Ah well," he said in a minute, quite tolerantly, "it will matter nothing, that! I shall like M'sieur milor' all the same. All the same I shall bring him his oceans of cold water, at six hours,—all the same."

"But I forgot," he went on. "Tenez, let us enter the Number Seven," and when within my bedroom he showed me a slip of paper. He rubbed his head. "Behold a letter, that descended from the trees!"

"From the trees, begor?"

"Behold!—yes," and he handed me the twist of paper. It was endorsed "To Monsieur the Englishman, at the Rusty Lance."

"And tenez!" said Pat. "Behold the saucer of the flower-pot!"

"Saucer of the flower-pot? What saucer of the flower-pot?"

"Dame! this saucer of the flower-pot." He was showing some fragments of earthenware.

"But I don't in the least understand the saucer of the flower-pot!"

"Eh well, M'sieur goes to be informed. See you,

M'sieur milor', it is nine hours of this evening, all the work it is finished, I me promenade a little, under the trees by the brook." He paused.

"Yes, yes,—alone?"

He grinned. "But of course not, no. It is only M'sieur milor' who promenades himself alone. M'sieur may not have observed Suzanne of the kitchen? Ah! well, Suzanne, she is worth the observing, M'sieur."

"Congratulate you, Pat. What then?"

"Ah well, we promenade; I am very gallant, but crack! Suzanne, she yells. Saperlipopette!—Suzanne, she her head rubs. 'Bigre!' Suzanne, she says. See you, M'sieur, the saucer of a flower-pot, it descends on the head of Suzanne. But Suzanne, she is thick of head, it matters nothing," he added philosophically. "Oh, just nothing at all!"

"Here's a poultice for the girl," I said, and he pocketed the coin. "That was a warning, Pat,—you must leave Suzanne tranquil."

He grinned and winked. "What would you?" he said. "But no,—the saucer that cracked Suzanne, it was meant for M'sieur. See now, the letter, it descended with the saucer, too!"

"Tied to it?"

He nodded.

"My Jove! that's curious, Pat. The most extraordinary things happen in Brivac."

"M'sieur goes not to read the letter?" he asked, all eyes.

"All in a little moment, mon ami." And I waited till he was gone.

"Monsieur the Englishman must not remain in Brivac. He is not in safety here. Let him go at once. The warning of a good friend." That is the letter.

The handwriting seems womanish; the thing fell near

the brook, Pat said ; on the other side of the brook is the high wall ; beyond the high wall is the Convent garden. It is quite the ordinary trick, that a woman would use. The inference leaps to the eyes, as they say in this land of intrigue.

The thing falls pat ; it has confirmed my resolution. At the first blush of it I swore I would stop and face the danger out, but my first decision prevails. I have sent Pat to post a letter telling Flapp that Groschaud refuses, that I resign the agency, and that he shall have all his money back in three days.

For a humiliating reason I can't square with him earlier than that. I mean to repay him every penny he advanced, as well as the sum he entrusted to me for Groschaud. And I haven't money enough of my own here.

I want my fingers to feel clean again, and to-morrow is dividend-day for me in England. I have sent a cheque for fifty to Goss, asking him to forward the money in five-pound notes, registered to the name of Monsieur Smith at the Rusty Lance of Brivac. Goss will do it, beyond a doubt. In three days or so I can repay Flapp, foot Madame's bill, tip Patrick nobly, and train away from the perilous Groschaud and the too-tempting Blulette.

To-morrow I go on pilgrimage, for my sins in coming here at all. It will be interesting, it will kill time to-morrow. And the clocks inform me that to-morrow is already come. I go to bed, but first I will see that the door is fast ; no more of the somnambulous Ledru.

XVI

“The burgesses and the right fair chapels.”

July 17.

I STARED at Groschaud with a grin of half-amused vexation, and the Major gave the intruder a glare. But no help for it,—we were not to be alone,—at the last moment the sleek, ever-present sky-pilot had boarded our compartment in the pilgrims' train. I might have expected it; other folk who wanted to travel to Duramadour had left us alone, with a “Vive Groschaud!” most amiably; but there is no escaping this limpet of a Ledru, the tireless spy of his Church.

The nuisance was that now the Major and I must sit mum; he could not hand me the letter for Flapp, and I could not pump him about the mysterious Blulette. “Confound the tonsured nuisance!” was what I thought; what I said was “Good-morning, M'sieur the Abbé. Did you somnambule encore last night?”

“Ah, my good M'sieur de Smit, it is Christian of you to inquire. Ah, yes, alas! And terribly!” he mourned. “This morning I myself awake, cold. Where think you I myself find! Ah, you will never guess,—never. Outside the chamber-door of Madame! What scandal, hein? For a priest! Ah, but it is terrible, my somnambuling! I go to the pilgrimage upon it again.”

Groschaud had not smiled: he sat staring out of the

window, resolved into the shell of his glummiest and most taciturn mood. Yet no interloper can be more agreeably conversational than Parson Ledru. Nothing offensively professional or unctuous about his talk ; he is very much the man of the world, like most of his cloth ; a sub-acid flavour of scepticism, indeed, gives a tang to his conversation,—he has a certain esoteric and augur-like way of regarding the outward and visible signs of his faith.

And he is learned about the shrine towards which we travelled. Duramadour is the oldest pilgrim-resort in Europe, it appears. It is more than mediæval, it is archaic. Roland the Paladin, did he not vow his sword there, his magical Durandal, before he crossed the Pyrenées, to fight the Saracen and die at Roncesvalles ? Saint Louis, that very Christian King and Crusader, did he not do penance on the rock of Duramadour ? M'sieur de Smit, in his quality of Englishman, would like to know that Henry Plantagenet made at Duramadour his oath of reconciliation with Becket ; Richard Heart of Lion pilgrimed there ; and the gallant Talbot, and Simon de Montfort, hammer of the heretic Albigenses,—but pardon ! M'sieur de Smit was tenderly Protestant, perhaps ? M'sieur would excuse !

Our train was rocking along between mustard-fields, maize-plots, and long soldier-like ranks of poplars that made the landscape lacey ; at station after station it gathered moss of pilgrims as it rolled. Peasants, in the main : the goodmen in black blouses and peaked high caps, the goodwives in black gowns and striped kerchiefs or white mutches ; their sons and daughters in hardly more modern attire. At every station a little flock of them was waiting, with the parish priest for collie : our compartment was the only one into which they did not crowd.

It was a popular pilgrimage, and yet the glory of

Duramadour is dimmed, the Abbé said ; it is no longer a place for miraculous cures of the body. Maybe the Black Virgin there is a little fatigued, the Abbé suggested slyly,—or jealous of the more triumphant Mary at Lourdes. For nowadays the incurable, the deformed, cancerous, halt, deaf, dumb, and blind are carried past Duramadour to Lourdes. “What insult, eh?—actually *past* the Black Virgin’s rock! Little wonder if she sulks!” suggested the smiling Ledru.

“Yet for the mind,—ah, for the *mind*, now,—Duramadour is still the shrine of shrines,” was the Abbé’s opinion. That was why he himself was its pilgrim ; because of his habitude somnambulous. Brother Saturnin, the Begging Friar so eloquent, would stir up the mind to-day. Ah, he would shake up the soul ; an apostle, he, indeed ! Eh, M’sieur the Major ?

Groschaud was staring out of the window still. He does not commit himself ; he must know the Abbé to be a spy of the Church. His glum silence got upon my nerves. The letter for Flapp lay somewhere under his tunic, I felt sure, and dread took me lest it should slip to the floor and betray us to the priest. I was agitated strangely at that idea, and the journey began to seem confoundedly risky and long.

But presently the shrill grind of the cumbrous slow brake sounded harsh at the tail of our train ; with a whinny-like shriek the iron horse came slippingly to a standstill, and out of the poky little carriages the pilgrims poured in flood. I rather liked the look of them : they were not the noisome crew that Gabriele d’Annunzio met with at Casalbordino, or the stretcher-borne host of piteous incurables whom Zola watched with tears at Lourdes. I saw no sores, wens, hunches, mutilations, elephantiasis, abhorrent enormities ; it was quite a holiday-making crowd that took with us the road to Duramadour.

We did not pad the hoof barefoot, nor go with dry peas in our shoes. We rode ; already the day was lazy with heat, and only the most pious or parsimonious of us walked at all. The rest of us were carriage-folk, borne in vehicles most extraordinary. "Vive Groschaud !" the footfarers cried, as the Major, the Abbé, and I rode past them, in a curricule so nondescript that only in delirium tremens could a Long Acre coach-builder conceive of such a gig. All the same, it carried us safely, across three miles of tableland, to the brink of the Tenebrous Valley,—a deep-cut gash, a crescent canyon, that curves and delves profound about the roots of the great red Rock of Duramadour.

Our wheels crunched to a stop near the sharp edge of that sheer gulf, and we stepped down, to pause and stare upon a magical scene. Shadow and mist of a faint Tyrian hue lay simmering in the hollow, but the Rock itself, sunsmitten into tints of jasper and porphyry, thrust up its convent-crested summit into a sky of naked blue. Topmost of all a minaret of a spire burned like a wand of flame, and vane and window flashed golden. There was sound in the air, sound almost angelical. Sweet bells were appealing from the convent roof,—or was it from the sky ? Insistent and incessant, they called the faithful to prayer.

Already the long day of worship had begun ; climbing and crowding upon the Rock, like ants upon their hill, I could spy a thousand pilgrims whom earlier trains and carts had carried there. These were the more earnest and devout, the spiritual descendants of palmer and Crusader, and fitly they came to Duramadour ; for, presently, as we melted into the throng of them, letting ourselves down by the Path Perilous into the Valley Tenebrous, I could tell to what a living relic of mediæval days we had come.

First, the ancient tall lanthorn of pierced stone, that

was beacon to the pious six hundred years ago ; then ramparts, a turretted gateway with portcullis still impendent ; and then a strait enshadowed street of battlemented inns and fortified cure-houses, incalculably old. Here the fresh oleanders preened their flush of youth upon haggard walls that bore the faded pride of knightly escutcheons ; here the eternal promise of the vine climbed greenly about the dry wine-bushes of hostels that housed Crusaders in the long ago ; here were cottages, roofed and floored in red and tawny grey, that had run with blood from the hewings of Huguenot swords. Above this immemorial street the Steps of Penance climbed to the crypt, the chapel, and their curtilage ; and higher yet, central and towering and overhanging, the castellate, terraced, stairwayed, burrowed Rock of Duramadour.

It beetles out above the huddle of dry old buildings, that seem like fragments split from its mass by frost and rolled to its foot pell-mell. Everywhere about it the houses jut, hang, lean, are buttressed, mortised, bulge upon one another ; the pile is a nightmare of the posed and imposed, poised and super-poised, almost defiant of any law of equilibrium. It is a clutching, slipping, grasping little bourg, that clings in desperation to the holy Rock : perhaps as the faith of moderns clings slippingly to a Church.

And everywhere pilgrims, pilgrims : pilgrims poor, pilgrims palsy : lean pilgrims, jolly pilgrims ; pilgrims shouting, pilgrims praying ; chanting pilgrims, laughing pilgrims ; and everywhere the name of Mary, cried incessantly, in a dull roar that set a basso to the holy convocations of the treble bells. The pilgrims shouted that name upon the terraces, moaned it upon the Steps of Penance, breathed it as along the Via Dolorosa they knelt at the Stations of the Cross. Groaning it, they toiled their

penitential way up the hundred steps to the Chapel Miraculous, steps worn and polished by the knees and kisses of a myriad myriad pilgrims, the centuries of Gallic Christianity through. Crying it, they thronged in struggling, thrusting knots around the rosary-sellers, crucifix-sellers, taper-sellers, medal and picture and image sellers, who drove a pious trade. Everywhere a swarm, a maze, a delirium of pilgrims, pilgrims ! and ever the cry of Mary's name going up to the impassive sky, outsounding every other sound.

"Ave, ave, ave Maria ! Virgin most merciful, Mirror of justice, Vase of devotion, Shrine of wisdom, Rose-mary, Rose mystical, Tower of ivory, Palace of gold, Star of our morning, Gate of our Heaven, Ave Maria ! Listen and save !"

The sonorous Latin vocables rolled out in rough Gregorian chanting, that almost drowned the women's voices in its guttural bass.

"Ave Maria ! Our Lady of sorrows, Queen of angels, Shield of the innocent, Health of the weakly !" the women sang. *"Dame of the seven sorrows, Comfort of the wretched, Madonna of good deliverance, hail !"* The women must have understood their words.

And yet among it all the perfunctory seemed to prevail : I perceived but little yearning in all this,—few signs of grappling at the Eternal by the soul. "Laudate, laudate, laudate Mariam !" the priests exhorted, as they shepherded their parish flocks along ; yet the call evoked but momentary enthusiasm, and ever and again the worship seemed to flicker like a feeble flame.

"Lip service !" I muttered, unjustly. The heat and the nausea of the stale unwashedness all around me made me testy ; discomfort stirred me into anger ; I uttered a fierce, unfair, condemnatory English word.

"Believe you in God, M'sieur?"

Abbé Ledru's question came apt as a reply to my damnatory utterance. At the moment we were picking our way between the kneelers on the zigzag stair, cut in the living rock, that leads under Gothic arches to the crypt of the Miraculous Chapel. "Believe you in God, M'sieur?" the Abbé said, as he caught the tone of my hasty word.

I turned upon him angrily. "Believe you in Him yourself, M'sieur priest?"

For a moment the smirking fellow stood abashed; but for a moment only. "M'sieur! *M'sieur!*" With lifted finger he reproached me. "M'sieur offends a poor servant of the Bon Dieu." And then, "Laudate, laudate, laudate Mariam!" he too began to exhort, for the first time that day, so far as I am witness, and he dropped to his knees and laid his palms together. At least he was in earnest now, the strange inexplicable fellow, for tears seemed to stand large in his eyes as he prayed. "Kneel!" he said, but Groschaud and I seized the occasion, escaping up the stair three steps at a time.

"Ouf!" cried Groschaud, "Good riddance!" said I, as we stooped through the low arch in the bailey and came within the curtilage, where the fabled sword of Roland sticks in the wall and the manacles of Christians rescued from Saracens still hang. We hurried through the crowd, past the taper and chaplet sellers; and we took refuge from the ascending Abbé within the crypt of that inconceivably primal hermit, Saint Amadour.

Now Amadour the anchorite was none other than Zaccheus, the chroniclers tell,—Zaccheus the publican, the little bow-legged Jew who climbed a sycamore to watch the Messiah pass. The curt Zaccheus must have disliked all crowds,—perhaps because he was lost to view among them; for finding ancient Palestine a place of insufficient

solitude, he sailed the Mediterranean Sea and came to build himself a lodge in the vast wilderness of Southern Gaul. And there the little man perched himself on the rock of Duramadour, whence he might view—but why should I pursue the tale? Though to this day may be seen the bed he hollowed with bleeding fingers in the flinty floor of his cave.

That cave is now a crypt, and no place for Zaccheus, for solitude has almost departed from it. Its natural walls, massy rude pillars, and roof of living rock uphold the Chapel Miraculous, that rose upon it centuries after the hermit's translation to heaven. Into this crypt we came, the Major and I, and found it for the moment all but deserted. Small old iron lamps, that glowed with just the tiniest of sparks, hung from the vault; the arrow-head flames of tall candles burned motionless, and amidst a lour of incense they showed like fleurs-de-lis upon a cloth of blue. From the porch a slash of white daylight cut the gloom, like the hew of Roland's sword; it gleamed upon fittings to and fro of hooded monastic forms behind the low altar.

"You have got the letter, perhaps?" I said.

Silently Groschaud unbuttoned the breast of his tunic. The sealed envelope *may* have passed into my care unobserved, but I doubt it. For just at that instant I was aware of a face at the doorway, peering in; it was, of course, the face of the omnipresent Ledru.

XVII

“A sound of whimpering and psalms.”

THE walls of that ancient inn the High Mother of God at Duramadour are thick enough for a feudal donjon, and the passages are narrow, tortuous, and dark. You eat there in a room so low that the hand can touch the ceiling beams. The High Mother is more like a fortress than an inn : in the old days it was both.

Yet one lunches well at the High Mother, hotel of a poor four francs a day though it be, according to Patrick. And the thick walls keep out the heat, the narrow window-slits exclude the glare. I found it pleasant to rest in the green gloom there this forenoon, shielded from torrid sunlight and removed from the noisy devout. A dozen middle-class pilgrims sat at table with me. Three of them were priests, village curés ; dear old gentlemen, delightful in their charm of gentle manner and simple dignity of station. I found them three friends for the while, and I had come to the High Mother alone. The Major left me the moment the letter passed into my hand : he had seemed restless all the morning, like one perpetually on the watch for someone else ; and when I came out of the crypt even the Reverend Ledru was gone. The Abbé may have entered the Chapel Miraculous to pray, for as I went hungrily down to the inn of the High Mother the bells

were sounding again. At Duramadour there seems to be an endless appetite for prayer.

I say that he *may* have gone to kneel in the Chapel, for I want to be charitable to the Abbé. I begin to feel ashamed of the harsh things I have thought about the Church in France. My three dear old priests gave me these compunctions. I think of the tolerant urbanity and unassuming godliness of those three ministers of the Bon Dieu with pleasure and with sadness. Three delightful old boys I would call them, did it seem duly reverent so to do; for they were almost like boys again together. Nearly forty years ago they were class-fellows at the Seminary of Toulouse, they told me, and the three of them had never met since then until to-day. The service of their Church had called them to parishes far distant from each other, across the length and breadth of France; and wonders of arrangement, and prodigies of economy out of their forty pound stipends, had been needful before they could manage to foregather once again.

"Forty years, M'sieur!—forty chapters in the book of one's life," said the sweet old curé from Carcassonne. The three were benignly merry over their meeting, and they took me into their pleasure and made me one of themselves for the nonce. Protestant and heretic I might be, but that stood for little with my three kindly, white-souled old priests.

"The Bon Dieu looks down on all, M'sieur. *He* is the judge," said the curé from Arras. "We are *all* poor sinners, alas!" the curé from Valence said with the most hopeful of smiles, as he filled my glass.

By now it was close on noon, and noon was to witness a special Mass in the chapel, they said. "The so-friendly English M'sieur will accompany us?" asked the merriest of the three, the frail little old curé from Carcassonne,

as he offered me his snuff-box. Of course the so-friendly English M'sieur would, with pleasure, I told him; and thus it came about that I was listener to the sermon of Friar Saturnin after all. For I had meant to quit Duramadour by early afternoon train,—to see Blulette, perhaps, was my unconfessed motive for that. And when I turned my feet the other way, towards the Steps of Penance again, I did not guess what things awaited me in the Miraculous Chapel.

The Chapel Miraculous is a Romanesque little church, almost square. The wide, shallow, blood-red chancel is hung with embroidered bannerets; the sky-blue nave is dotted over with votive hearts and stars of gilt or gold; the pillars are tattooed with rings and triangles of crude colour; in short, the decoration of the spoiled little place quite reeks of ecclesiastical bad taste. To regard the interior alone you would hardly think it old, and yet it is a place of bygone marvels. It is the Chapel Miraculous because of its famous Black Virgin, and the ropeless ancient bell on its roof that is never rung by human hand.

Into this place of appeal to the soul through the senses I went with my three old friends. I snuffed the puffing incense and the odour of melting wax; I blinked at the brightness of amice, stole, and dalmatic; I heard the chanted dolour of prayers, the shouted fervour of psalms, and for the while I, too, was caught by hypnotic strain and nervous exaltation,—a pilgrim, for the nonce.

Our eyes were set upon a coroneted Image, the black-faced doll of olive-wood that Zaccheus St. Amadour brought oversea so long ago. This dwarf of a Mary,—conceived, not immaculately, in the brain of some Byzantine carver as "black but comely," a daughter of Kedar,—stood robed in laces and cloth-of-gold and roped with pearls

and strings of votive rings. Terraced rows of tapers surrounded her, priest and acolyte genuflected before her, and

"Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix,
Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi,"

with yearnings the pilgrims sang.

Here was a spectacle to pain a Protestant, yet thrill him. Comet-like from the gallery above the pulpit a bulbous silver thurible was swinging its sudden bursts and trailing tail of smoke. Dimmed momentarily by these gusts, a hundred tapers burned within the shallow chancel, pale points of amber flame against the reddish background gloom ; they lit the missal, flickered on the varnished face of the Image, sparkled on the jewels, and yellowed the fair white cloth of the altar. Dronings of plain-chant, swells and cadences of psalm, tinklings of a little altar-bell that sounded like the cracked laughter of some satiric gnome ; and then the monotone of the ministrants again.

Flashing at the gold of their chasubles and dyeing their surplices, lines of rainbow sunshine fell through windows of azure and vert and gules ; an upper ray touched the Virgin's head like a visible halo from Heaven. Sanctity, isolation, around the altar and within the chancel, even in so pent and filled a little church ; but, ranked from altar-rail to portal, the steamy press of pilgrims, the crowd and pack, the listening, praying, sobbing, antiphoning crowd.

"Ostende nobis, Domine, misericordiam tuam.
Et salutare tuum da nobis."

The priest censed the altar, the deacon censed the priest, the chasuble flashed as the priest bent his kiss to the altar's rim. He turned to the people with magnificent gesture. "Oremus !" he commanded, and the stately Mass marched

on. The Book was placed on the altar again, the priest blessed the censer, the deacon kissed his hand, the Book was incensed thrice. "Gloria tibi, Domine!" and in gruff chorus, "Laus tibi, Christe!" With lifted arms and joined hands the celebrant gave the Credo. And thus in the rich gloom of the chapel, amidst memories and mysteries of old miracle, the noble words of the Office moved on to the culminating act.

"Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis!"

The sharp warning tinkle of the little bell is heard, there comes a shuddering hush, an unnatural pause of the very breath; for the pilgrims the moment of moments, the instant of mystical transmutation, is at hand. To them the bread is flesh, the water and wine are blood, the sacred body is visible in the exalted Host, the blood swims in the lifted chalice, "Corpus Domini,—Sanguis Domini—custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam, Amen!"

A sobbing rush of respiration and relief went like a wave across the congregation. They rose, a surge and counter-surge of movement took them, I was encumbered and pressed upon and shifted aside,—the pilgrims elbowed me. And suddenly I remembered the banknotes and the letter.

Pickpockets go on pilgrimage, professionally, folks say; and nearly a thousand pounds' worth of paper-money had been lying under my waistcoat. I carry the notes about with me because there is nothing safer I can do. I dare not leave them locked in my kit-bag; to give them into Madame's keeping or pay them into the Brivac bank might awaken comment and police suspicion. For how to justify my possession of so much loose money? What should an ordinary touring Englishman want with so large a sum in a town so small?

But the pickpockets! Hurriedly I fingered my waist-coat. There was a crackle, the notes were safe. I clutched at my jacket pocket, and I caught the letter just as it was slipping to the floor. A moment I held it in my hand, distracted from the thought of it; for the congregation had surged again, with a movement like the ripple of wind on standing corn, and out of the press near the door a face had flashed upon me, radiant with the unstained day. It was the face of Blulette.

I think she did not see me; she was gazing towards the pulpit expectant, her eyes dilate. She stood within the shelter of a little side-chapel that lifts its floor two feet above the level of the nave; I could see her plainly, she was companioned with a nun whose robe and guimp and coif were foils to the feverish brilliancy of the girl's rapt face. Again I was astounded at her presence; what should a chanteuse be doing in the Chapel Miraculous, with a holy sister for duenna and guide?

Even Groschaud himself must have wondered at that, I thought. He was staring at her from the opposite aisle, his eyes were set at her so hungrily that I looked to see her signal him. Gendarmes stood near him; the white on their uniform was tinted in the coloured lights. Now what should gendarmes be doing in the Chapel Miraculous? I remember wondering that. And suddenly I knew that it was not alone to hand me the letter that the Major had made the journey to Duramadour.

Yet that letter, his trust to me! In the first moment of surge and press, what was it had hinted danger for my pockets? The glide of some swift deft hand down my side? A minute earlier, and three priests had been my neighbours; now there were four. The three were the dear old boys who had brought me thither; the fourth was the Abbé Ledru.

Abbé Ledru was standing quite near me now, with his hands ostentatiously stuck in his girdle. He smiled at the brusque question in my eyes. "M'sieur desires?" he said. He may be innocent of it, after all; it is hard to imagine a priest a pickpocket. And yet some stealthy hand had been at work.

"What hotness terrible!" Ledru went on. "But bear it a little longer. M'sieur goes to hear—ah, behold him!—the Brother Saturnin." The Begging Friar was mounting to the pulpit as he spoke.

I put the letter out of my hand into my breast-pocket, and buttoned my jacket over it, heated though I was; and, lifting my eyes after that, the loveliness of Blurette's face took them once more. She was tip-toeing, eager to see and hear. Now why on earth should this chanteuse be longing for the sermon of a Begging Friar?

XVIII

"He heareth in the Chapel the voice of a Lady."

"**S**AVE, for we perish!" the homily began. "We are the most worthless of all the unworthy, Lord! Yet descend, and pardon, and save!"

The bald and all but fleshless head of the Friar—a head that bulges above the brows and ears, a living skull—was lifted in adjuration, and then was sunk in the act of silent prayer. And next, with his dark gaze he swept the faces before him; he flung out his thin arms with swift, compelling gesture; and instantly, cast into a state of hypnosis, the packed and perspiring audience was still.

The man was pent in a pulpit too small and low, too hedged about by taper and shrine and altar. He had not his freedom; rather angrily, I thought, he twisted his cord girdle more tightly about his lean flanks. Then he leaned on the pulpit bar, and the neck of his torn old gaberdine fell away from his skeleton throat. "Poor devils!" he began. "Poor devils of sinners, unworthy to live, unfit to die! God pity you, Mary intercede for you! For if not——"

His hands were up above his head, and now he dashed them down, the fingers held claw-like. "If not!—the pangs of Purgatory, the fires of Hell!"

He paused, and a shudder took his listeners; he frowned, and the women fell sobbingly to their knees. He cast out

his hands again with magnetising movements, and through those rigid fingers of his some physical influence passed hypnotical, compelling. Physical fright and anguish had seized upon his hearers. "Oh, let us escape!" he cried. "Orate fratres!" and with a rapt aspiration of eyes he prayed aloud:

"Lord who hath built us, let us not fall! We confess our weakness. Avarice constrains us, gluttony degrades us, lechery fouls us, wrath makes us murderers at heart. Sin upon sin, we have amassed a mountain; and the sins we dared not act we have done in thought. Give our eyes fountains that we may weep ourselves clean. Thou hast horror at none, but strike us with horror of ourselves. It is Thee we soil, it is Thee we slay. It is we who sin, but Thou who bleedest!"

Brother Saturnin's mouth is the mouth of an ascetic, his brows are the brows of a mystic, his eyes a fanatic's eyes. He is a preacher born and practised; all the instincts and arts of the pulpiteer are his. Every note in the gamut of speech he knows; he can use the terrifying *sforzando*, the shock of the *staccato*, the benison of the *andante*; he gains the full effect of the lifted crucifix, the interjected supplication, the swimming eye, the pause dramatic, the pointed finger of personal appeal. His best is scorn, denunciation; he might be Stylites, descended to find the world a lupanar and France its vilest stew. He preached as a Frenchman to Frenchmen this afternoon; he scourged and stung them. He is the very Peter for a new crusade; and soon I saw that he was come to Duramadour to preach a crusade for the King.

For he turned from the evangelical to the political. "Poor France!" he groaned, "she that was queen of the nations, how is she fallen! She that was star of the world, how is she quenched! Our country still, but no longer

the greatest ; Catholic still, but no more the elder daughter of the Church. Her glory as handmaid of God's Vicar is departed. And that—*that* !—is why she is spat upon and made a thing of naught !

“ Ah, think with pride of what France has been ! And think with tears of what in shame she is ! France the true to God, a liar to the altar ; France the guard of the Pope, the persecutor of priests ; France the loyal to God's anointed, the den of a Republic. Remember Saint Louis,—and think of Loubet ! Remember Austerlitz,—and Siam ! Poor France !

“ See now, you moneybags and land-eaters, you with your full stockings and bank-books and vineyards and farms,—you who expect to purchase pardon for being Frenchmen at the price of a cheapened ticket to the nearest shrine,—*you*, you ! If you would spend a centime of every franc that God has given you, and go on pilgrimage to Rome, you would see in the Hall of the Immaculate Conception a picture of what France *has* been. There, on the steps of the Virgin's throne, at the right hand of the Pope, stands France—*stood* France—in the person of the Emperor ! Even the Bonapartes acknowledged God ! It is only your Republic that is godless. The Kings of France, the Line Royal, what lovers of the Church were they ! Here on the stones where some of you kneel,—ay, down, the rest of you ! guzzlers, bibbers, lechers, usurers, Republicans, down !—here Saint Louis knelt, forerunner of the King whom your Republic despoils. He, your Royal Master, could he be here to-day, would kneel where Saint Louis bowed. But where's your President, your sham of an elected King, poor Émile, your booby of a Loubet ! Where does *he* kneel ? To what minister of God pours he out his soul ? To what saint does Loubet pray ? . . . To Saint Panama, the unrepentant Thief ? ”

The Friar had passed from theology into treason. This was stark rebellion. "There'll be the deuce to pay for this," I was thinking. For gendarmes were listening, the Government would get to know, the Bishop would be made to dis-benefice the curé of the Chapel, and Friar Saturnin would find himself in gaol.

I watched the hearers. The peasants seemed almost as stolid and cow-like as before, but folk who understood what was afoot, the middle-class pilgrims with much to risk and little to gain by revolution, were twisting and shuffling, eyeing each other uneasily, muttering to each other, and some of them making towards the door. And I saw an officer of gendarmes elbow his way to a position nearer the pulpit, with a notebook in his hand.

Brother Saturnin lifted his crucifix from the pulpit bar. He put his lips to it and held it out in blessing.

"My children, my poor children! See here your King in Heaven, He bleeds for you still! And there!" he pointed to the black Virgin—"see there the Queen of Heaven, our interceder. Aye, kneel and adore them, our King and Queen in the sky. . . . But where are our King and Queen on earth?

"Fled to England!—even your arch-enemy, even the heretic, is kinder to them than you. The Republic exiles them, persecutes the Church, imprisons the religious, forsakes the Pope, blasphemes the Holiest! And you, *you*, *you*! poor shadows of Frenchmen, you consent. You raise no voice, you draw no sword. . . . Be men, be Frenchmen; in God's name I cry to you, be what your fathers were. Up, up, for Christ and your earthly King! Up, up, for the Majesty of Heaven and the Royalty of France! And down with the curst Republic!"

A shudder ran through the listeners. Protests, prayers, sobs, imprecations, were heard. My three old curés were

praying, even Ledru had a troubled face. The commandant of gendarmes was waving to his men. "Stop him, you must stop him, I tell you," he was fuming. "Stop him, can't you?" I heard him shout to the secular clergy, who were whispering together in the choir. This was treason, it might become Revolution, it must cease, it *must* be stopped; I felt that myself.

But the Friar towered terrible in his pulpit. "*Who* shall stop me?" he thundered. "I am God's trumpet, I speak God's words; the hand that touches God's messenger will rot!"

So splendidly zealous was his tone, so compelling the influence of his eyes and gestures, that even the gendarmes hesitated, and there was a minute of pause. And then a wedge of pilgrims drove itself between the police and the Friar; struggle and tumult were about to begin. But the pulpit thundered again, arrestingly:

"It is the will of God the Republic shall die! Twice He has scourged your Republics. The Bonapartes were God's sword and scourge. A third time God calls for a Man? Who shall be our Deliverer to-day?"

His eyes burned down at Groschaud; compellingly the crucifix was thrust towards him. "We call on our captain, God claims him; in the name of God and France and the King I say it,—let his sword shine forth!"

"Vive Groschaud!" was heard from a knot of pilgrims who seemed to act together. I saw Groschaud's hand go to the hilt; sobs, prayers, applause encouraged him; hisses made him frown, the gendarmes were struggling toward him, the crowd was surging against them and driving them back, we hung upon the edge of battle. And then, keen and decisive at the straining point of tension, a clear bold call was heard:—"Allez, Groschaud! *À bas la République! Vive le Roi!*"

It was the voice of Blulette.

A thrill, a shudder, a surge of the over-wrought crowd, and the next minute gendarmes were pressing towards the quarter of the church whence came that treasonable cry.

An impulse took me; I elbowed my way rudely till I came within close sight of Blulette. She was enshadowed by the low arch of the little chapel, and even those who had been kneeling near her may not have known that the cry was hers. Doubt, terror, mutual suspicion, were written on their crowding faces. But I could tell her voice, and her features betrayed to me her treason; her face was lit, inspired, exalted; her lips were parting for the call to arms again. The gendarmes knew her too. Groschaud was agonised for her; he, too, was urging towards her, hustling through the crowd and making to her defence. And then, then, at the very height and stress of that tense moment, *Clang! clang!*—the deep rough toll of a great bell!

It came from overhead, and the pilgrims shrieked at the sound; it was the clamour of the Bell of Miracle, that hardly once a century is heard; that only hands unearthly ever toll!

"The Bell! the Bell of Miracle!" the pilgrims were groaning. They felt the vibration of it at the roots of their hair, they shuddered, gasped, were stricken chill. "The Bell! *The Bell!*"

"It is the voice of Heaven," the Friar thundered foamingly. Clearly the thing had been planned, it was well stage-managed, it made the heart beat painfully—even mine. "Hear it! it is the call of God!" he almost screamed. "Up, Christians, fight for the Faith! Down with the Atheist Republic! Draw the sword!"

He brandished his crucifix with splendid gesture, he slashed the air with it as if with a sword; and almost

instantly a new shout, of corporal fear and horror, went up to the babel echoes of the roof. That wild blind stroke of his had laid a tall taper low, the light and the burning wax had touched the trappings of the altar, a row of little blue tongues appeared, they lipped, bit, grew,—the laces of the Virgin's robes were ablaze ! “ *Fire ! FIRE !* ”

The pilgrims shrieked that word, fatal and horrible in that packed little place with its one hope of exit ; but a louder shout of horror came from the pulpit. Turgid and convulsed, the Friar threw himself down the four steps ; clutching he fell upon the altar ; clawing and brushing with his arms and breast he sought to dout the licking tongues of blaze. “ *Sacrilege ! sacrilege !* ” the pilgrims snarled, in a panic of physical fear and supernatural frenzy ; and then delirious terror made them a mob. For the holy Black Virgin was flame-sheeted, she crackled and blazed, the tapers around her melted, fell in together, clung upon each other, burned confluent, hissing, the chancel radiated heat ; and louder, fiercer than the hiss and gusty warm uproar came again the clangour of the Bell !

Horrible ! it was horrible ! The pilgrims were now but a broken wave of humanity, a fighting, thrusting, clawing ravel of bestial creatures enraged by peril and fright. I caught at Blurette, I had reached her just in time, I dragged her back from the outrush and held her close. I saw Groschaud go struggling down the surge and breaking foam of maddened beings that swirled against the piers of the church. His arms were out swimmingly, like one borne off by a sudden tide. But I could not watch him long.

The whole chancel was ablaze by now, and even the priests were screaming units in the rush for safety ; cleric and worshipper alike were thrusting, trampling, stamping, stampeding, brutally fighting their way without respect of

person or sex, out—out through the wafts and stifle of greasy thick smoke—towards safety and free air. The congregation devout in a moment had become a mob insane. My God, but the panic of the French is horrible to see!

I had caught back Blulette, I say, but she was struggling outward too. "No, no,—not you, not *you*!" her voice came savagely to my ear, as I gripped her close,—it sounded like a weak high snarl amidst the mass of shouting, screaming, beseeching, cursing noise. It was life or death to keep her in that shelter, but I was thrilling at the touch. I gripped her so close that I felt the pumping diastole of breath sob in her breast against my arm. "You *shall* not!" her snarling cry came to my ear again, and I thought she was straining away from me to reach Groschaud, repugnant from myself. That angered me, and her face that instant was so like a countenance of hateful memory that I almost thrust her out into the rush and crush.

But the nun beside us clasped her, my impulse was momentary only. The nun was shrieking too, her visage within its pallid bandages greened corpse-like, ghastly. "Sacrilege!" she was screaming. "The Virgin burns!" Shrieking, she clasped Blulette, but kicked the while, absurdly, at a postern dissimulated in the little chapel's outer wall. The blaze of the chancel lit and showed me the little door; I flung my weight against it; it yielded,—light and a gush of air came in; I saw the nun's starched headgear flap in the sudden draught, she stumbled through the opening, I pushed Blulette outside, "Ouf! ouf!" I panted, "God! we're safe! we're *safe*!"

Yes, we were safe, we were safe and alone; we were islanded alike from the fire inside and the panic crowd in the curtilage; we clung together at the railed-in base of a flight of steps that lead by a bridge from the nuns'

private entrance in the Chapel to the gate of the convent-garden above.

Bluette had returned to her senses, she ceased to seek escape from me, she even caught at my arm. "Quick, quick!" she muttered, fear-smitten now that the danger was past; and together we clambered, behind the weeping nun, up the steps to the crown of the Rock.

There rose the convent, high, serene, impassive; its bells in the minaret still calling, calling to prayer; innocent and ignorant of all that had passed below. Type of the Church amidst the human horrors of the world, I thought: the convent seemed a priest of stone.

But we were not stone. Bluette was weeping now. "You don't know,—you don't *know*!" she sobbed, incoherently. She had caught at my hands and was thanking me speechlessly. "You don't know, you don't *know*! Oh me, he doesn't know!"

"It's nothing," I said. "It's over now, my poor girl!" . . .

Yes, it was nearly over; from our perch we could look down and tell that the panic was almost at an end. The curtilage and the Steps of Penance were dark with fleeing pilgrims; though the front of the Chapel Miraculous was blurred with wafts and eddies of smoke, the worst was over, thank God!

"Thank God, thank Mary!" sobbed the nun.

"I do, my sister," Bluette wept.

"A lucky escape," said I, and then I clutched at my pockets. Suddenly I had bethought how close the stress and clip had been, and my hand went to my breast with a jerk. But all was safe.

The nun mistook my gesture. "M'sieur is hurt, he is burnt!" she cried.

"Oh no, my sister."

"Thank God for it, M'sieur."

"My sister, I do."

"Let us all thank Christ and the Virgin," said the nun, on her knees.

I looked at Blurette's beautiful face ; it was unscarred. Even her hair was unsinged. "*You* are not hurt?" I said.

Her hands were at her ruffled hair, and I gasped. For an instant the sunlight on her head had suggested the whiteness of a certain lock.

XIX

"Fate's fingers touch the stops in tune."

"LET this be a warning to you, young woman!" I was jesting, an hour later. "No more pilgriming, no more downing the Republic, my faith!" But she was staring stonily out upon the plateau, with a white and anguished face.

"No need to worry now. It wasn't so bad, after all. I imagine everybody escaped the worst. Anyhow, we diddled the gendarme! I pity him, poor fellow: Mother Mary Agnes will have got him; with that crutch!"

But she would not be comforted; she was grieving silently; living it all over again. "Failure, always failure!" she muttered.

"Bad enough while it lasted, of course. But it wasn't your fault, though you *did* cry 'À bas la République!'"

Her eyes blurred themselves with slow tears.

"Maybe the gendarme wasn't after you for that," I went on. "Maybe he was running up to the convent to get the Sisters go nurse? . . . Anyhow, don't worry, Blulette,—Ma'am'selle,"—and I whipped up the mule with the withy.

I was driving Blulette post-haste from the Rock to the railway-station of Duramadour, over the plateau. We were in flight, in a mule-cart. The mule-cart was a ridiculous vehicle, and the very way we came to be using it at all was absurd; I laughed at the remembrance.

But Blulette was tragical of mood: she could not even smile at the memory of Mother Mary Agnes and Mère Gigot.

I have started this chapter of my diary in the middle, the device of a novelist who seeks to make a break. But now let me go back to the beginning and thread the missing beads.

We rested awhile, Blulette, the nun, and I, on the small platform that juts from the garden-gateway of the convent; still panting with heat and effort, we looked down upon the steps, the curtilage, and the scurrying pilgrims below. Until we espied a cocked-hat gay with lace, a brass-hilted sword, and a uniform of blue and white coming up, two steps at a stride, the flight of fifty or sixty by which we had mounted to our perch. And at the sight of that uniform the nun was shaken into an agony of fear.

Ah, for the good Mademoiselle, it must be! for Mademoiselle so loyal and pious, that the frightful policeman was coming! To arrest her! Because of her words in the Chapel! the Sister declared. Oh, Mademoiselle must not be taken! it would be terrible, that! Mademoiselle must hide, hide,—yes, hide in the convent, yes!

"Oh quick, be quick,—by here, through here!" the Sister palpitated, as she tugged at the bell and rattled at the knob of the jealously-boarded, shut little gate behind us. "Come! Yes, it is the only escape! Quick, Mademoiselle! Come!"

The gate behind us was our only safe outlet; precipitous rock or sheer wall lay right and left of us, and up the steps below the gendarme was mounting apace. "Enter quick, Ma'am'selle," said I.

But Bluetie did not stir. The gate now stood ajar, but she would not enter. "M'sieur must escape as well," she said, "I shall not,—alone."

The nun wrung her hands. "Impossible! M'sieur cannot enter. What would Mother Mary Agnes say? . . . Our rule it is so strict, he cannot! You well know he cannot!"

"But, my sister, he *shall*!" The chanteuse spoke imperiously, almost as Lois would have done; she caught at my arm and positively pulled me in. The portress banged and locked the gate behind us, and then threw up her hands. A man, an Englishman, a heretic within that chaste enclosure the garden of the convent! Oh, saints! it was too much!

"Mon dieu! mon dieu, what will Mother Mary Agnes say?" the nun's teeth were chattering, as the ugly old deaf-and-dumb gardener who tends the vegetables and flowers there straightened his hunchy back a little, to stare and grin, old fool.

"Mon dieu, mon dieu, if Mother Mary Agnes should see! If Mother Mary Agnes should hear!" our nun was palpitating. "Quick, M'sieur,—for the love of God very quick,—by here, by here!" and she stumbled on ahead, up the terraced walk towards another gate in another wall, a wall that was bounteous and beautiful with grape and fig and peach.

That upper wall abuts on the high-road which skirts the northern brink of the Valley Tenebrous, and we reached it only just in time. For the gendarme was rattling and ringing below; we could hear the lay-sister's voice in shrill shocked altercation with him, and then the jar of the opening gate. "Mon dieu, but he enters, that man so terrible! He will take Mademoiselle, he will arrest her!" moaned our nun.

"Not he," said I. "He shall not, my Sister!" and I

fumbled at the bolts of the blinded upper gate. But just at that moment the bell of it tinkled ; we were besieged on that side too, it appeared !

" Jesus ! Maria !" The nun almost sank to the ground. Blulette was flushed, but kept herself calm and regarded me steadily. I had the sense of being on trial ; I was a man, it was for me to act in the emergency,—that was her thought, I could tell. Indecisive I stood, a minute : then I pulled at the door.

It opened. " Cast linen, broken victuals, for Mère Gigot ! For the love of the Bon Dieu, alms to poor Mère Gigot ! "

A grimy and tousled old harridan was whining and curtsying before us, and no second gendarme was to be seen. Holding out her cupped palms, and mowing with what was meant for an expression of pious misery on her ugly old face, the beggar begged at the immemorial place of alms. Astonishment at the sight of me there checked her whine for a moment, but quickly it began again. " Cast linen, broken victuals, for the love of God alms ! " And just at that moment I heard the squeaking scratch and irregular thump of a crutch on the flagged walk behind us, and an inarticulate snarling sound arose that nearly sent our nun into a fit of fear.

I turned : a second nun, a crone like the Mère Gigot, was making towards us painfully : aged, lame, and bent, she thumped along on her crutch, muttering anathema. She must be the dreaded Mother Mary Agnes, I knew, and by now the gendarme was well inside the garden : I could see the blue and white of him, low down through the angle made by the crutch. It was a moment absurd but exciting,—dangerous for Blulette, maybe. I caught at her wrist and pulled her out into the road.

Behind the Mère Gigot was standing a frowsy mule in

trousers,—yes, on my life, a trousered mule! tailored in rotting canvas against the sting of mosquito and fly. This remarkable beast was harnessed by a web of string and rope to the most tipsy and rickety of little two-wheelers ever seen. Mère Gigot's mule-cart in which she carries the gleanings of her begging is a ridiculous equipage, no doubt, but it could serve as a vehicle of flight; brougham or hansom would have been more tempting, but I did not hesitate for that. "Jump in!" I commanded, and helped Blulette to obey. I stood up beside her, snatched the reins of string and the whip of withy, and the next minute we were driving away. Along the dusty road, under the scorching sun of afternoon we went, in full retreat from the Mother Mary Agnes and a gendarme: pursued.

Yes, we were pursued, but only by Mère Gigot. "My Adalbert! Ah, robbers, render my Adalbert! Ah, thief! Ah, ignoble pig!" the mistress of the mule ran yelling. "Ah, species of a mangy cur! Ah, dog of a pig! Ah, pork of a puppy! Render my Adalbert, thief!"

A dab at phrases, the Mère Gigot. I threw her a five-franc piece back over my shoulder. "I'll leave Adalbert at the railway!" I shouted,—“you'll find the thing at the station, confound you!” But still the owner of Adalbert panted after us, shrieking her “Pig of an English!” and “Pork of a dog!”

I laugh at the memory as I write; I was strangely light-hearted to-day,—disgracefully so, considering all that has happened to-day to sadden a reasonable soul.

"Hep, hep, my Coco!" I remarked to the mule, as I plied him with the withy. The ugly brute went fast, even in trousers. The Mère Gigot, Mother Mary Agnes, and the gendarme lay far behind; the Valley Tenebrous and almost the Rock of Duramadour were out of our horizon now, we were stirring up the fleecy dust of the

middle plateau road. For the last quarter of an hour I had talked and talked, in a way—for Alain Tanger—strangely loquacious. I was trying to console the beautiful being beside me; but the effort was vain. Blulette sat silent, the far-off look in her eyes was dimmed now and again, as a blur of rain obscures a pane.

"No need to worry,—we shall get away safe,—nothing else on the road after us,—it wasn't your fault,—the gendarme was harmless,—anyhow, we're managing cleverly!" I said, again and again, in a fatuously exalted way. I was feeling preposterously gay, and suddenly I knew *why* I was gay. . . . Revulsion, contrast, relief? Nay, it was not these alone; I thrilled with a perverse pleasure whenever the jolts of the machine we rode in threw us for the least momentary touch together. Possession, pride, triumph were in my gaiety. *Enfoncé*, Groschaud! dished Groschaud! out of the nettle danger I was snatching the flower; I was aboard the lugger and the girl was mine.

And then I made a clumsy misfooting. "I don't suppose the gendarmes recognised you at all," I said. "No need to fear; you shall be safe,—I'll see after that, my faith!"

She turned upon me, her beauty burned red, the wells of her tears were dry in an instant.

"*That?*" she cried. "Dull that you are, it is not *that*! I have failed, but I can—— Do you suppose I am a coward? . . . I will pay, I don't fear prison, . . . are you so blind as to think it is *that*?"

Her tone was more humbling than her words; I grew almost irritated. "Then what is it, my girl?" I testily said.

"You,—*you* saved my life. And——," her lip and chin quivered as she broke off.

"Oh, that was nothing," I told her. "Anybody would

have done it. Your suitor, the Major, for example, just as well."

"The Major!" she snapped. "You think I care for the Major?"

"My faith, he cares a good deal for you."

"The poor Groschaud, the poor Groschaud!" she murmured to herself. "Another, he! . . . Perhaps he is dead. . . . I am a wicked thing. . . . But M'sieur is alive, M'sieur the Englishman has the luck of his country, *he* is not burned!" I am pretty sure she said it sarcastically; but with a woman one never knows.

"No, I'm not burned," I grumbled. "Nor Groschaud, neither. Did you expect me to die, then? By the blue, this is a thin reward for bilking the gendarme, and braving Mary Agnes and Mère Gigot."

"Tenez, M'sieur," she turned on me with a catch in her voice, "why came you to Duramadour to-day? Why did you ever come to Brivac at all?" Peevishness sharpened her tone.

"Ah, you are there, you are at *that*, are you?" I said. "Well, it is Fate, Ma'am'selle. . . . I came to Brivac by accident, you will well understand; one does not *propose* to arrive and rest in a hole like Brivac, eh?"

Her eyes, that were searching mine, said neither yea nor nay.

"Ah well, I come,—anyway, I come; and I find you at Brivac. I hear you, I see you, I,—I mistake you for—for some one else. . . . I go to the Café, merely to slake my throat and rest from the sun, and ah! I find you there encore,—it is Fate that there I shall find you. Then I to myself say, 'I must not see Ma'am'selle again, she is too charming, she would not love me, and I,—I am not free. . . . I shall keep myself away from the Café of the Comedy.' That is my resolve. . . . You comprehend?"

She answered only with her searching eyes.

"Ah well, I myself keep away,—I go not to the Café," I fibbed. "Last night, you do not see me, hein? It is hard, but there! I do it. . . . Eh well, Fate will not have it so. Fate sends me to Duramadour. I am to be spectator of unusual things, in my country we do not have pilgrimages,—I go to Duramadour merely to see. I think I leave Ma'am'selle Blurette behind, at Brivac. Ah well, no! I find her at Duramadour. . . . It is Fate; it is not me. . . . I come,—*you* come. . . . Why did you come, may I not demand? When did you come? Tell me that."

"By the second train," she said, impassively.

"But why?"

She kept silence.

"Ah well, it matters nothing, why: Fate sent you, it is all Fate. . . . See now, I am at Duramadour, I go to the preaching, a thing quite natural, eh? For the moment I think not of Blurette, not at all! Well now, see how Fate dances me, a marionette! I lift my eyes. Whom do I see? I see Blurette."

She stared along the road before us, silent still.

"Blurette is brave, she is generous, she will not fly herself and leave me to the brass sword. Fate makes me the coachman of Ma'am'selle at this moment. . . . Ah well,"—I shrugged my shoulders and touched up Adalbert,—"I am not stronger than Fate."

"It *must* be Fate!" she muttered, after a pause. "Failure,—always failure." Then I saw her fingers clench into her palms, and her face burn with its rich carnation. "Do you go to yield to Fate from this moment?" she questioned angrily.

"I do."

"And Fate will make you to make love to the singing-girl?"

I shrugged my shoulders with quite a Frenchy air. "How do I know? I cannot tell," and I flicked a buzz-fly off Adalbert's long left ear.

"She would be honoured by your affections, perhaps?" the angry tone went on.

"My faith, I can't say that. But I am sure that so poor a fellow as I would be honoured by hers."

Again her eyes were suddenly wet; again she fell silent. "Hep," and "Eup," and likewise "Hué," I remarked: I was encouraging the mule.

"Tenez, M'sieur," she began again, "let us comprehend. It is blague, it is fudge, what you say about Fate. . . . Confess, now, that you have laid your plans. . . . Confess that you don't think me what I am. . . . Confess that you suppose me some one grand, whom you have met in Paris,—your—your—*how* did you name her?—your——"

"Lois," I said. . . . "Yes, at first I took you for a very cruel lady, whom I hate. But I've got accustomed to the likeness now."

"And now you know your mistake, what is it you have to yourself said?"

I kept silence, in my turn.

"Confess, now!"

"Confess what, Ma'am'selle?"

"Confess that you to yourself have said, 'Tenez, here is a pretty piece, a little singer,—what pastime, hein? For a week? Not bad, the little Bluettes,—for a chanteuse, for a town of the province. Pretty enough for a rich Monsieur, eight days or a fortnight! And practised enough not to ask for a wedding-ring. . . . A bank-note at the end,—or a bracelet if she is silly about money,—and Adieu, mon amour,—good-bye, the little Bluettes!'"

With what an intolerable sense of stain she seemed to

“speak! “Ma’am’selle, Ma’am’selle!” I protested, but she stormed on.

“And if the rich M’sieur should ever chance to meet the little singer again,—oh, purely by accident, elsewhere,—why then, a lift of the hat, a ‘bon-jour, ma fille!’ at the most, and that will be all. . . . That is what you have said to yourself, Englishman. Confess it: it is true!”

Her cheeks were like sunset, her tone was acid, her eyes searched mine deeply; but I withstood the gaze.

“No, no, I have said to myself no such things, Ma’am’selle. I respect Bluettes. Alain Smit, he has never to Alain Smit said such words, my faith!”

“Alain Smit? I comprehend not?”

“That is my name, Ma’am’selle. At Brivac. Alain Smit is the name of your coachman to-day; half French, half English.”

Keenly she eyed me again. “Do you say you are half French? What nonsense! You are Jean Bool!”

“But no, but no,—it is my name of travel,—that is all.”

“Ah!” she respired. “If M’sieur *were* French and Loyalist, I say not what might. . . . But no,” she broke off, “M’sieur is English, M’sieur is Jean Bool all the way through. English, all English,—Mon dieu, *how* you are English, M’sieur!”

“Wasn’t aware of it,” I said. “Rather proud to hear it, though. Thought I was more of a cosmopolite than that.”

“But no,—you are Jean Bool,—you could not have an ideal,—you could not have faith!”

“You are hard on your coachee,” I said, whipping up Adalbert. “Sorry he displeases you so.”

“But no!” she almost sighed. “It is not you, it is I. . . . I use you badly, M’sieur Alain. . . . And then you save my life!”

"Nonsense!" I laughed; not even her fretfulness had dashed my spirits. "I only diddled the gendarme,—I did that much, I'll allow. . . . Here's the station, anyhow! And diddled the gendarme is, unless we've an hour to wait for a train."

I pulled up the mule with a flourish, in front of the Café of the Rendezvous of Pilgrims which lies in wait outside the railway-station there. The fattest Frenchman I ever saw (and that is much to say) was perspiring under his own vine and fig-tree in the shade of the verandah of the Rendezvous of Pilgrims. He was clearly the proprietor of the place. "Tiens, tiens," he said, as he blinked at us. "It is the Adalbert of Mère Gigot!"

"So it is," I said, descending. "The brav' Adalbert himself! M'sieur will perhaps accept this franc, for his garçons. See, I go to attach the more than Roman nose of Adalbert to this post. Mère Gigot, she goes to arrive for her equipage so neat and fashionable quite soon. If M'sieur will be so polished as to charge himself with Adalbert meanwhile?"—I lifted my hat.

The fattest of Frenchmen laughed till he shook like a ball-room jelly. "But certainly,—with excessive pleasure,—M'sieur the English is droll," he said. The waiters were listening and smiling too. It was plain that no news of the dire doings at Duramadour had reached these pleasant people; no gendarme could be lurking for us inside the railway-station; Bluet and I were the earliest on the road.

"A brave steed, Adalbert, though not of a strict handsomeness," I remarked. "Swiftly have his trousers conveyed us, I trust in time. If M'sieur would have the polish me to inform at what hour parts the Brivac train?"

"But in a little moment, M'sieur,—it goes to arrive,—tenez, M'sieur can hear it:" and indeed the puerile toot of the conductor's horn was sounding a furlong away.

"That is good. I thank you, M'sieur. Messieurs!" I lifted my hat; with a special bow to Adalbert himself.

"M'sieur et 'dame!" The fattest of Frenchmen tried to get up and congée, so polished was he. And three minutes later Blurette and I were safe in a second-class carriage, bound for Brivac, alone; with not even a travelling postman in the next compartment to peer at us through the little party-window as he sorted his bags on the rack.

XX

"Where are you, when the moon shall rise?"

T O-NIGHT I dined almost alone ; the garden of the Lance was well-nigh empty, and Madame was much perturbed about the fate of her absent guests. Groschaud, Ledru, and the pilgrims were not yet back from Duramadour, and Brivac was full of sinister reports.

I dined in silence, meditatively ; I had much to think of ; I was discontent with my own behaviour in the affair of the fire. A man, quite a decent fellow in the ordinary way, may come to act like a cad or coward in an emergency. It was Madame who awoke my self-criticism for me. She had wept at the ill news. "Oh, the poor folk !" she cried. Then she looked at me in a certain way. "M'sieur is safe," she said. "M'sieur was not burned?"

"Not a bit," said I. "Luckily."

"M'sieur was not able to stay and help the poor burnt ones?"

The query vexed me. "Peste, Madame! what would you? I did my possible,—I saved two."

"Two is something, M'sieur," and she moved away slowly, past the many gaps at the table under the berceau.

Two is something,—oh yes, it is something,—I did not wholly fail in natural succour to my kind. But Pat had brought to table the rumour that a hundred had been burnt or trampled to death at Duramadour. A monstrous exaggeration, of course, but it did not edge one's appetite

for dinner. Before I went to table I had seen Madame going in and out of bedrooms. She must have been estimating how far the luggage left in them would go towards paying the scot of the dead. Altogether the circumstances were rather horrible to-night.

And further,—I had Blurette to meditate upon. I have come to think that I am making myself worse than a cad or coward over the girl. I wish to Heaven I had never seen her; I curse Flapp for ever getting me to this place. Blurette is turning my brain, it appears. I was desperately gay, I could joke, this afternoon, with all that misery only a league behind me, I was merry because she was with me in the cart. I shirked the plain duty of going back to the Valley to help,—indeed, I never even remembered there was such a duty; I drove away with Blurette light-hearted,—a feckless feather-head fool of a fellow, more so than ever before.

Perhaps the thought which bothers me most is that Blurette can hardly esteem me for what I have done. She must have noted my miss of humane feeling and action. For herself, she was in peril of the police, one can understand *her* flight,—but *mine*? She must have read as heartless what was really only thoughtless. That was why we were not happy together in the train; she must have expected me to hurry Adalbert back to Duramadour and lend a nursing hand. But I was too absurdly exalted, just to be with her,—too fey about her, a Scot would say,—even to think of that. The weak strain in a man's character comes out at such a pinch as I have known to-day.

Blurette was silent with me in the train, almost all the hour's journey to Brivac. Her manner daunted me, and it was long before I spoke.

Then, at last, "You are sorrowful, Ma'am'selle," I ventured. "You have melancholy? I wish I might comfort you, some way."

She kept her face to the window a full minute longer, before she turned grave eyes on me and spoke. "But you cannot, M'sieur Alain,—no one can. . . . Look you, it is life,—one has sorrows just as one has breath. . . ."

"But you are too young for that!" I said. "And too beautiful and charming."

"Perhaps," she said; there is no affectation about the girl; she knows her own charm. "One may be a chanteuse, yes; one may look fine, and sing fine, and laugh fine, yes; but look you," she muttered, "life, it is not a sweet dream."

That touched me. "My poor girl, how can I comfort you?" I said, leaning from my corner.

"M'sieur can leave me tranquil," she snapped, peevish again with one of her sudden changes of mood; and again she turned to her window. At Brivac she left me with hardly a bow; and there on the platform I stood,—stupid, a mere disconcerted clown, awkward; too timid of her, or too scrupulous, or too vague in my intentions, to step to her side like a man. . . .

I'm afraid I'm in love with the girl, I dare say I might propose love to her if I were free. . . . In short, I am a fool, and a scrupulous fool. Any other kind of a fool would have caught up to her, or followed her, or something. . . .

Why not? I owe Lois Amaury no fidelity. Why should not Brivac be the scene of a morganatic honeymoon? If she but would?

There is Groschaud, of course. Groschaud is ready to wed her right-handed, any day of the week. But I don't see why I need consider Groschaud. Every man for him-

self, and I have no longer any need to diplomatise with the Major. . . . I have resigned my berth as Flapp's agent. Flapp has gone, but he may have had my letter. . . .

"M'sieur is sad, M'sieur goes to sour the wine with his face!" said Patrick, giving me a friendly little tap on the arm. "Is it that M'sieur regrets he wasn't burnt? To a coke?"

"I don't know why I shouldn't regret it," I grumbled. "I really don't see why I shouldn't, ashore!"

Pat lifted his shoulders. "And M'sieur a Milor'! Tenez, burn Abbé Ledru to a cinder, Patrice would not say nay. But *M'sieur*! Ah no!"

Positively the good fellow's eyes were damp. I clapped him on the back as I rose. "You're a brave friend to have," I said. "Glad you weren't there yourself, mon cher. But the Abbé's all right, you may wager your napkin. We'll see him back again, never fear,—nothing could keep his finger out of a pie."

"He shall burn some day, death of my life but he shall!" Pat is not Irishman enough to reverence the priesthood per se. "And M'sieur would not pay a mass to save his soul!"

"Faith, no!" I said, "I don't like the beggar," and Patrice chuckled as he ran to open me the gate.

Even a chat with Pat could not brighten me out of my doldrums. I am sick of Brivac; and the angering thing is that I can't quit it just yet.

I have twenty-two thousand francs in my pocket, and yet for the lack of a ten-pound note of my own I am tied by the leg. And Heaven knows now how I shall reach the mulattó.

"Curse all money!" I grumbled, as I took the random little street that leads from the Lance to the market-place.

This eternal want of pence has puzzled me all my days ; I am a bad hand at book-keeping, I never know exactly the length of the stocking, and impecuniosity is a fetter on my ankle that every now and then fetches me up with a jerk.

I had taken the road to the market-place, but I debouched on the Square ; the while I was musing and cursing, "a spirit in my feet" had led me to the spot my head had warned me to avoid. Eight o'clock struck as, shamefacedly, I mounted to the terrace ; but the singing did not begin. I sat outside and awaited the pianist's prelude, in vain. Irritably I rose at last, and passed inside the saloon.

The mayor, his adjutant, some non-commissioned officers, the principal mustard-miller, a vintner or two, the editor of the "Lamplighter of Brivac," the conductor of the Fanfare, and the captain of the Fire-brigade were all there, the accustomed faces ; busy with billiards and dominoes and manille. But the low little stage was blank, the instrument stood in its housing of dust-cloth, and even the Widow Bonami was missing from the mirrored counter, her throne.

"Why doesn't the signing begin?" I grumbled at a waiter.

He pointed me to a placard hung behind the door. "In honour of the catastrophe at Duramadour, Madlle. Blulette sings not this evening," the placard read.

"I might have guessed as much," I muttered. "I doubt her singing again here ever. . . . She'll fear the police, after that mad cry of hers at Duramadour. . . . Ah well, then,— its over, all over. Nous n'irons plus au bois,— les lauriers sont coupés."

It was stupid, it was absurd and insensate, but my depression worsened more and more. How could I dissipate it, how kill the lingering hours? I was drifting

aimlessly up the boulevard now, towards the Lance and the chamber historic ; and the tinkle-tinkle of the beuglant caught my ear. "There are other singing-girls in Brivac !" I said bitterly, sneering at myself and Blulette ; and I turned into the beuglant garden.

The garden of the beuglant is dark and shrubby ; secluded arbours, with seats for two, are faintly lit from the stage inside. In the garden of the beuglant one may drink and arm and lip and whisper, half-unseen. There the vacuous mind can be titillated by blushful songs : the fleshly eye can there be fed by the spectacle of the bolder sisters of Blulette. As I sipped my liqueur in the beuglant garden to-night, a money-shell was shaken under my nose, and I felt the engaging pressure of a knee. A strapping blowen, flaunting in gypsy red and yellow, was beaming down on the rich Angliche, what time she rattled the expectant shell ; I bestowed the smallest copper coin, and fled.

With what a shaming sense of contrast I came out into the calm dignity and luminous charm of the boulevard, sky-lit alone. Till then the night had been a night of stars, stars only : the satellite that lanterns our petty planet and dims the stellar abysm was laggard, and in the firmament had hung a million million suns, swinging like God's own censers, floating, gravitating, levitating there, grape-clusters of them, bee-swarms of them, galaxies and archipelagoes and fleets of them, detached and rolling ship-like in a sea of raven blue. By the mere retina you could tell that those diamond points were globes and suns ; you *saw* their roundness, you felt that if a hand could be thrust so far it might pass between them and amidst them, and hollow its palm upon their curves. To-night the heaven was no vault inlaid with shallow patines of bright gold ; to-night the orbital scheme of the universe in wheel and

whorl and ellipse spread revealed. Never a sky bends over England such as that! I am an earthly fellow, to have quitted that spectacle for the beuglant scene.

But now, as I fled into the boulevard road again, it was a night of stars and moon: the tardy satellite was lifting, full of garnered glow. She aspired from the horizon, moving her smile of brilliancy and dimpled shadow among the pied trunks of the avenue, and playing at hide-and-seek with the trees' twisted arms; she rested on the branches, was caught and diapered by nets of tremulous leaf and twig; till at last, into a sky of tissue argent, she swam clear of all, to whiten the streets and roofs of Brivac, and roll her glassy waves along field and river and hill. The avenue before me was now a stream of moon-snow, dotted with black groups of folk in twos and threes; I knew their errand; they were strolling to the station, to watch the express storm past.

To watch the rapide pass is a standing form of placid pastime in the little towns of France. Your shop is shuttered, your evening is on your hands, you tire of dominoes, cards, or the beuglant, your leisure is a bore. Then, what to do? Come, let us allons to the gare and view the rapide file!

"Allons!" I said to Alain Tanger.

The gare is waking from its sleep, the gas-points hung along the platform grow each into an inch of flame, the electric bell in its pump of a turret is sounding, sounding, with tintinnabulation that tells the thundering moment to be at hand. "Make attention, take guard, put yourself aside!" the Chief of the Station commands you. It is an honour to be shouldered back by such a noble functionary, more imposing than ever at this nightly crisis of his charge: your wife and daughters marvel at your bravery,—to stand so near the shining rails, at such an hour! A wild shriek cuts you, the turn-tables clatter lumpily, the burnished metals groan in their relapse, it is upon you, you get an

instant's glimpse of folk at rest within the belly of the monster, the yellow windows pass you like a streak of flame with the screaming rush of a rocket,—a whirl, an eddy of air and noise, you feel yourself drawn inwards and downwards, you catch yourself back,—ah, you are safe, the rapide is past !

It buries itself in the hill of darkness yonder, the tail-lamps are red glow-worms now ; and while the roaring, reeling, tipsy station subsides on its foundations your fancy follows the fleeting train. Whither are they flung, those whirled-past helpless mannikins, so caught and carried off, mere flies upon the mighty wheels ? Who are they ? What errands of love or lucre, life or death, compel them to such haste ? To what bourne bound ?

To-night I marvelled exceedingly as to the bourne of one of them : for, unmistakable at the lit window peering out, I had glimpsed the dam' blackness of that eminent wine-merchant, Auguste Flapp. Now where the name of patience was *he* bound ? . . .

I trod the platform up and down and down and up, as I puzzled over the mulatto's presence in the rapide. The platform was crowded still, and more than ever to-night ; the people were waiting for the omnibus-train with news from Duramadour. I tried to think about Duramadour again, but could only puzzle over Flapp. Confound the fellow,—this flight of his from Angoulême must mean new bother for me : I can't deliver Groschaud's letter to him now, I must be longer burthened with his dirty cash, I shall have to guard the notes and the letter back to Paris,—perhaps to England. Confound the sooty idiot ! is he so certain, then, that—or has he found himself spied upon at Angoulême ? And what of the watch on myself ?

Perhaps there was a mouchard of the Republic shadowing me to-night, upon the very platform of the gare. . . .

But the train from Duramadour was jolting in, and fifty people were getting ready to descend the break-neck carriage steps. One wore his arm in a clumsy sling; I recognised him as one of Madame's pilgrim guests. Then I heard the cry of "Vive Groschaud!"

The Major was descending, with Abbé Ledru for companion. The sight of those two together gave me shame; the soldier and the priest had fought against death, while I fled; *they* had held the field, while I was fooling with Adalbert, and philandering with Blulette.

The crowd were gesticulating around the priest and the soldier. "A hundred dead? Oh no, mon dieu! it is not so bad as that! Yet the Chapel Miraculous, it is gutted, alas! And the Black Virgin burnt to a cinder! Sacrilege, Messieurs!"

"But the pilgrims, the pilgrims?"

"Ah! M'sieur de Smit, it is your honest heart that speaks," the Abbé fawned. "Thanks be to the Virgin, who let her image burn instead of the faithful, many a hurt and bruise but only one death. Friar Saturnin, he is badly burned, and a priest is dead, a poor curé from Carcassonne! Crushed to death, rest his soul!"

I turned away, with almost physical nausea. I could have heard of a dozen other deaths with less compunction. . . . My poor old snuffy friend of an hour, benign and godly! . . . And perhaps I might have saved him,—I might, had I not run aloft! . . .

Angrily I stamped away, wroth with myself and Ledru,—Ledru, who sees everything, knows everything, is in at everything, and escapes everything, in the most irritating way,—Ledru, who had played the man, while I,—

I strode off quickly, but before I reached the boulevard the creak and jingle of military garniture sounded at my heels, and I felt an arresting hand.

I turned upon the Major savagely. "What now?"

"Bluette?" he panted. "About Bluette?"

"Don't you know?" I wondered at the fortitude of the man, who had stuck to his salvage work all these hours, while his heart was torn with fears. "Don't you know? She wasn't hurt."

"I saw you with her! You got her safe off? . . . She wasn't molested. . . . By police?"

"Of course not, of course," I said, somewhat dubiously, for I remembered the gendarme.

"I thank you, M'sieur—I thank you for saving her," he cried, with the most utter and hateful air of proprietorship, confound him! "Morbleu!—I don't blame M'sieur, but I ought to have saved her myself."

I lost my politeness at that, even to so fine a fellow. "I wish to God you had!" I swore with explosion.

He stared as I shrugged off his hand and crossed the road. Then he caught up his scabbard and hurried on his own way.

"Going to the Café, no doubt," I grumbled. "He'll insist on seeing her to-night, singing or no singing. The best thing I can do is be off to bed."

But I followed the Major instead. Quickly he went, through the flaky snow of the moonlight and the fantastic bands of shadow that lay upon his path. "Vive Groschaud!" said the tradesmen on the terrace. The Café was empty of music still. I watched and saw that he sought no entrance there, before I turned away.

I came through streets all black and silver, full of silence and white light, the monkish cowl-like shadows of turret and gable about my feet as I hurried to the Lance. And here I sit in the chamber historic, writing with coat and waistcoat off, for the air has grown breathless the last hour. The clock is striking one.

XXI

"Such are my engagements to myself that I dare not promise."

July 18.

I AM the merest shuttlecock of dream and circumstance. I can almost hear and feel the battledores thud against me as they drive me, a whirling feather-head, the sport of whim and incident, fro and to, to and fro. This morning dream impelled me to Bluette; this afternoon accident repelled me into dishonour. Fate is my governor, I say; fatalism comforts the weakling and the fool.

This morning I awoke in the most absurdly exalted state of spirits; what has happened since then hardly leaves me patience to recall the mood in which I awoke.

In dreams all night I had seen Bluette. I dreamt I was back in London, it was Bluette who dazzled me at the theatre, it was Bluette who knelt with me, meek at the marriage-altar; the clergymen were Goss and a red-whiskered frock-coated Ledru. It was Bluette's hand I held under our rug, all our buffeted way across Channel, while the Widow Bonami rode a bicycle up and down the funnel and the captain was Mère Gigot. It was Bluette who came with cry of Hep! and Hué! and tang of bell to the Rusty Lance; and now it was Bluette, a blushing bride, who was tapping at my door.

"And I a maid at your window.
To be your Valentine!"

I leapt out of bed, my heart preposterously fluttering, Old celibate Pius the Seventh frowned down at me from his frame, but I took no heed of that. Half-dreaming still, I turned the key and pulled the curtain and let the morning in. But it was Ganymede, red-headed Ganymede, who entered, bearer of coffee nectareous,—not agate-eyed Hebe, Blulette.

"*You!*" I frowned. "Peste! it is *you!*" But I turned my whew of disappointment into a laugh and a whistle.

"Tiens! M'sieur Milor' is gay?" Pat's eyes roved round for an empty bottle. "Is it that M'sieur has well slept?"

"Like the seven Ephesians, asthore!"

"And the thunder, it did not wake M'sieur?"

"Thunder? Never heard any!"

"It is well. M'sieur, then, slept very sound. Nevertheless, it thundered."

"Funny I didn't hear it," said I.

"M'sieur goes to arise now? No?"

"Like the lark,—a late lark," said I, as I stirred my coffee, and "I arise from dreams of thee, in the first sweet sleep of night!" I sang, in my absurd elevation of spirits.

"M'sieur is gay. It is well. M'sieur thinks of a little friend so-charming," said Pat, as his eye roved after that suspected bottle and fell on the spare pillow.

"I'll do more than think of her,—I'll see her, and make love to her before the day's out," I was resolving. For this morning I was sure she would still be in Brivac, and why not see her at once? My dream had impelled me to her so forcefully, I could not wait till evening; why not at once?

"Tell me, then, Pat, where does Ma'am'selle Blulette reside?"

A wink and a twinkle in his sunny eyes. "But in the House of the Café of course! With the Widow. Where else, M'sieur?"

And at the House of the Café I found her. Widow Bonami was busy on the terrace. "M'sieur comes early," she smiled, when I asked for Blulette. She pointed me to a door in the wall at the end of the terrace. "If M'sieur will give himself the trouble to open that,—and proceed."

In a minute I was jubilant, effervescent. So it was not any more difficult than this? Even the Widow was propitious, a smiling accomplice. They say a woman is a castle best taken by storm; by storm I had already captured the gate.

The handy little yielding door at the end of the terrace let me down by three steps into the trimmest of tiny walled gardens, a garden that positively laughed me welcome, so shining and smiling its morning face. There must have been thunder rain last night, though I slept too soundly to hear it, for everything had been washed resplendent, and the air was intoxicatingly fresh. Within the little garden there was still the splash of water, for a miniature fountain jetted its crystalline spray up against a silvered glass ball that gaily shone in the sun. A berceau of roses and vines ran its trellis invitingly across, and led me merrily up to the door of the House of the Café, a door that was bright with paint and finger-plates, a cheery, welcoming kind of a door.

It stood ajar; here again was invitation; who could hesitate? Jauntily I touched my fingers to the wood. *Tap, tap*; I had no thought of defeat; the very sunbeams egged me on.

A woman's bicycle was resting near the door, a costly and dainty machine. "Must be Blulette's," I thought as

I waited ; and then, impatient for conquest, *tap, tap*, I went again.

" . . . *trez ! Entrez !*" It was the voice of Bluettes, and I entreated.

I entered a parlour all gay with geraniums and cheery with the chirp of canaries, all suffused by light and sweet air coming in through a window garlanded with vine. The little room was fresh and clean as morning itself, and Bluettes in her gown of linen looked as dainty and cool. But her eyes were violet-lidded ; and, " You have not well slept, Ma'am'selle," I stammered, to her eyes.

" You ! *you !*" she had said, in sudden affright.

She had risen quickly ; she had been writing, she dropped the pen. Her heart must have been beating apace, I felt the tremble and rapid pulsation in her hand as it gave itself a moment to mine. Then she drew back hastily, to shuffle together the pages of manuscript that lay on the table. Confusedly she bent over her papers ; eager, I thought, to hide them. Maybe she is a diarist herself.

" An author, then ? " I smiled.

" Oh no, M'sieur Alain. Not at all. I have not the mind." She laid the sheets of writing neatly together, just as neatly as she repacked her work-basket the first afternoon. She covered the sheets with blotting-paper. And then she lifted her face at mine, with a look of steady inquiry.

I could not return that frank regard ; somehow, it scared and bedumbed me. My jauntiness had already begun to ooze away. This was not the rosy and facile Hebe of my dreams of last night's pillow. This morning she looked the Saint Touch-me-not that Patrick calls her : a sheet of crystal could not have isolated her from me more than did that calm set gaze,

"Why is M'sieur here?" she asked, and I had no answer ready. Why, indeed? I began to be ashamed; I felt that I was not playing the game.

Again she broke the silence. "Much honoured!" she said, and made me an ironical curtsy. "But I permit myself again to ask, why M'sieur Smit has come hither? . . . I thought it was Madame Bonami tapping. . . . Is M'sieur come to be thanked once more? For saving a poor singer's life?"

My jauntiness was all gone by this; and I could not find a plausible word of answer. Confound my dreams! I began myself to inquire why I had come, with what hope, to what intent? "I am the worst sort of fool," I thought—the kind that counts too confidently on weakness in a woman. Weakness? Her eyes were steady and powerful on me all the time, and silent I stood, a wordless oaf before her.

"But respond to me, then,—behold the third time that I make the same question! Why M'sieur has come?"

It was either turn and go or answer something. "My faith, Ma'am'selle,—I—I come because—because I cannot help it," was what I stammered. Her instant smile of conquest doubled my shame.

And again there was silence betwixt us. I was banning myself whole-heartedly. What of your dreams *now*, Alain Tanger? of your braggart hopes, an hour ago? . . . What *were* your hopes, by-the-bye? Had you any reasoned plan? . . . *Do* something,—say something,—anything, you fool! . . . This is France, that girl a yard away is French, a 'mere café-chantant singer . . . what would a Frenchman do in your place? . . . don't you well know? Wouldn't he seize her fingers, bend his knee, and mouthe out a flow of endearment? . . . And maybe that is what she is expecting, like them all. . . . Try it, try it on, man,—do something—*anything*!

Ah well, I was saved from being wholly knave and fool ; I only began that rakish programme. I whipped myself on so far ; I opened fire : I took two steps to the front and caught at her hand.

I caught at it, only : for—"Là, là, là, là !" her voice tinkled icily, as with a little wave of her reverted hand she signed me back.

I had not even touched her finger-tips, she did not need to stir an inch to the rear.

"La, la, là ! What does M'sieur dream ? . . . M'sieur must not take too loose a thought of Blulette." She said it with close lips.

Her face had clouded over : storm gathered in her brow. "Tenez, you mistake. I am a chanteuse, but not—" Rain hung in her eyes as she boggled at the word.

That touched me, beat me. "Ma'am'selle, it is not that,—Ma'am'selle, it is not *that* !" I cried to her intensely. My arms went out pleadingly, not embracingly now. "Blulette, *Blulette* ! . . ."

I shuddered, as at some desecration ; suddenly I knew that I loved this girl ;—for the time I loved her reverently, sacredly, as a man his promised bride. "Blulette,—*Blulette* !"

There must have been conviction in my gesture, in my cry. For she shook away her tears, she came to me steadily ; it was a forgiving Blulette, forgiving and infinitely tender, who yielded me the treasure of her hand.

"You suffer, M'sieur Alain ?" Her voice was low, her eyes were drooped, her other hand was gentle on my arm. "You suffer much,—because of me ? And me, too, I have much suffering,—because of you. . . . My poor M'sieur Alain, how we are unhappy, the both !"

She was close to me now, she leaned towards me ; blood was beating in my temples, I could *hear* it beat ; I

seemed to be speaking to her with every twitch of my nerves, but I found no words. . . .

"Poor me, the poor Blulette!" I heard her sigh. At that moment she was—how shall I describe it?—both suppliant and haughty; breathing the chastity of womanhood yet the zest of honest love. Her eyes were passionless and impassioned, they held me back while they drew me, she was both hardy and timorous, love-humble and sex-proud. . . .

"*Blulette?*"

"It is that you make me sad!" she answered my questioning cry.

"Blulette, *Blulette!*"

"Speak, then,—speak!" she panted.

"Mon dieu, mon dieu! . . . Can't you see that I love you,—*love* you, Blulette?" . . .

"You love me true?"

"I love you true."

The colour left her face, she shook with excitement, but she did not speak. She was listening, listening for my further words. . . . I could read her thoughts; she waited listeningly; for her it was the moment of her life, a crisis of hope and dread.

This proud poor girl, tempted but unspotted, penniless because she will not shamefully be rich,—it must have been the instant of her life, big with possibility. I was English, I was the Milord, I was lover, I might become husband and shelter. And I stood before her reticent; I wooed, but little spoke. She listened and waited,—for just the words I could not say.

How could I say them? Somewhere in the world there is a Lois, Blulette's bad image. . . . Yet not to speak was to wound.

I flinched at the ordeal; huddled I stood before her

stupidly, helpless, wordless, my cheek ashamed, my eyes held down.

Speechless too, she waited; the silence between us deepened, hardened, became vibrant, seemed to swell into positive sound; it pained the ear at last, it buzzed, it roared intolerable, it *must* be broken, it would explode! . . .

She broke it. "Speak, then!" she panted.

I lifted my eyes, her gaze was on me, vivid and appealing. . . . She could not comprehend. . . . "*Speak, then!*"

Again I dropped my eyes.

She could postpone the issue no longer. "Mon dieu!" I heard her murmur. "You say you love me?"

"Bluette, Bluette,—I do."

"As an honest girl? . . . I *am* it!"

"My God, Bluette,—I do!"

"Marry me, then! . . . *Marry me, Alain!*" . . .

A dozen times I have cast the pen aside. I don't know why I set my ignominy down. I write for my own eye only, and I shall never need a remembrancer of that scene. . . .

"*Marry me, then!*" Again she spoke, and still, even yet, she hoped and waited. But again she saw me impotent to say the word. Wonderingly her gaze searched mine; beguilingly her hand crept on my arm, almost she yearned towards me. The near temptation of her lips was torture . . . at that moment the likeness made her seem the woman I had a sanctioned right to clasp. . . . My arms went out, they touched her—

"Mon ami! mon ami!" her voice came pleadingly.

"Bluette!" I groaned; my arms fell back, again I hung my head. . . .

She seemed to comprehend at last; her face flushed

darkly, tears broke from her lids and fiery anguish dried them.

"You insult——" she began, and then a gust of sorrow shook her. . . . "I—I will tell——" she sobbed, but the sobs that broke her utterance made her sway: she caught at me blindly, I clutched her, held her fast. . . .

Silence again, but for the weakening sobs, that stilled themselves so slowly; and then, upon her face as it was turned to me I saw a strange triumphant smile, like gleam of noon on victor's crest. "I win you," she murmured, proudly. . . . "I have you now." And then she lifted her head in quick alarm, for I was silent still. . . .

"See you, mon ami, I love you, love you," panted from her lips like breath. "I was so blind, but I love you, love you. . . . I know it now,—I am no longer cold,—I shall yield. . . . But oh, mon ami, Alain, *Alain*! . . . won't you make me your . . . so honourable wife?"

XXII

"Proteus was her ancestor."

I DON'T know why I write it down,—it is hard enough to do, but I have kept the record thus far, and I hound myself to go on. Perhaps, if I live, and can break the fetter, Blurette and I may read all this together some day,—some day "with weeping and with laughter,"—some day.

I staggered as I went from the House of the Café. I had been unstrung, I was outworn; I cursed Groschaud, I bedamned my February idiocy, I raged at Lois Amaury Tanger's very breath. My poor Blurette! the cad and knave that I must have seemed to her, until she learned that I was mostly fool!

"Won't you make me your wife?" she had said. And all I could answer was a hangdog glower.

"Won't you, mon ami?"

"Mon dieu, Blurette," I groaned. "I can't. . . . I *can't*!"

Then my arms lost her; her face was keen and hard again, it was wan and ireful, lips and chin were sternly set.

"Why not?—say then, *say* then,—why not?" The words came sibillant and almost fierce.

I shrank from the confession. The baseness of my bargain with Lois had never till then seemed half so base; the last scales left my sight, and I saw my own "damned blackness."

I shrank from the confession. "I,—I am so poor," I stammered to her harkening eyes. "I have no position, I am poor,—four thousand francs a year,—I——"

"Money!" she broke in; her lips seemed to puff the thought away. The bitter look vanished from her face, she leaned towards me again. She was pleading and wooing me mutely, with eye and lip and every attribute of loveliness and grace. . . . "See now," she whispered, "I will give up it all, I will forget my word, I . . . you shall not repent, Alain,—you shall forget,—we will be happy, happy! *Poorness*! I care not for poorness, I! . . . To be your honourable wife!"

"My God! Blulette," I groaned,—"you don't *know*!"

"But what, then? Know what?" she trembled. . . .

I had to tell her. I had to unveil the miserable story. . . . "No wonder the woman hated me, I comprehend that now," I muttered at the end. For silently, with great eyes listening and hand at sobbing throat she heard me to the end.

She wept as I told her how I rushed from railway-station to railway-station in vain quest, a madman for the while: there was cloud as well as rain upon her beauty when I stammered a hint of my reckless passing of that night. She broke down there. . . . "Mon ami, mon ami!" she mourned.

I told her of the miserable months that ensued; of my accelerated decadence; of my gambling debauches; of how I had taken a nigger's fee and come to Brivac at last.

Her wide eyes stared at that. "For *that*, then, is it that you come? Not for to chase your wife?"

She looked at me wonderingly as I told her of the search that had failed for lack of money.

"But,—but she sent you much money, you said?"

"How could I touch that? How *could* I?"

"Yes, that is honest of you; I love you better for that. But the poor Lois,—if she knows you scorn the money, how bitter for her to know! . . . Ah, the poor Lois!"

"Mon dieu, Blurette! You pity her? Can you?"

"But see! She has lost you,—oh, she did not know you, she could not. . . . She has lost you,—for always, the poor Lois. . . . And you could never love her now?"

Illusion came upon me once again. "Good God, how like! . . . how like her you are! How——"

"And still you can care for me?" she broke in peevishly. "*Don't* say I am like her! . . . You will hate me for it!"

"Before God, Blurette, if Lois were you, I,—I think I could forgive her all!"

"Let me be Lois, then, let me *be* Lois," she hastily whispered, repeating it insistently. "Let Blurette be what Lois might be—what she would wish to be. . . . Oh, we don't know how it is . . . you must forgive the poor Lois,—yes, forgive her!" she cried, fractiously. "Say you forgive her!"

"Not I! . . . You seem to take her part," I cried, peevish in my turn, for we were now both overstrung. "You seem to take her part, mon dieu! Why? Why should I ever forgive the scheming, wretch of a——" Her hand went to my mouth.

"Hush, hush, you must not say such things,—she is your wife!"

So low she spoke that I could hardly hear, close as she was to me again; it was her hand upon my lips that stopped my curse. "Tenez, mon ami,—the poor Lois . . . one does not know her heart, ah no!"

"Heart? She has none. . . . Else why should she marry me and quit me,—all in the fortnight and the hour?"

"Ah yes, mon Alain, yes, . . . but I can guess a little, why."

"Can you, my Jove? It takes a woman to see through one!" I said, testy again.

"But see now,—I think I understand,—poor Lois, she had to marry you,—*had* to,—there must be a too-strong reason, yes. . . . And then, see you, she did not you know, she would think it was only her money. . . . And then,—then . . . I comprehend well how she would the thought hate . . . to have you . . . husband to her . . . when she did not you love. . . . Ah, it would be too horrible, that,—I comprehend how she would shrink off from that,—I comprehend it well, oh yes. . . . See, now, it is like I should shrink off from—from—ah, well, by example, from the poor Groschaud!" She stirred in my arms and almost smiled.

"But you *don't* shrink off from him," I said, jealous now. "I see you meet him, in churches. You let him kiss your hand, you give him your arm in his, you laugh with him,—oh, you don't shrink off from Groschaud at all."

The loveliness of her face was alight with pride as she listened: proud love glowed with her, as in a lamp its flame.

"Ah, I am now sure that you love me,—I am sure now, because you make yourself jealous!" she cried; and then she gave me little words of tenderness and touches of caress, that even for my own eye only I will not desecrate by penning here. "Groschaud! Pfut!" she ended, shooting his name from the bow of her lips, just as she had puffed away the thought of money. "See you, mon ami, it was my business to talk sweetly to Groschaud! It is *that*!"

Confirmation of an old suspicion came in those words. The church, the garden of the Saint Sang, the Friar's

confident appeal to the soldier, Blurette's own cry in the Chapel Miraculous. . . . "Blurette, Blurette!" I cried, "I believe you are a wine-merchant!"

"Wine-merchant? *Wine-merchant?*" she puzzled. "But I comprehend not,—I comprehend not at all?"

Yes, yes, I had found her out, I told her; yes, she was at Brivac to buy the red wine of battle from the Major; she had been using her smiles and her songs to win his sword. For whom? For the Duc d'Orléans, of course. Down with the Republic and up with the King, à bas the tricolour and vive the fleur-de-lis; Hurrah for the white cockade, hein! Was it not so? Was it not? say then, *was* it not?

She quibbled with the charge.

"Blurette, my dainty wine-merchant, my sweet mystery, I am finding you out." I laughed; I was happy again. "Ah, I shall discover all, all," and at those words she stammered and flushed and confessed.

"See you, mon ami, it is past now, it is all past, that! It is true, I tried to serve the King. But I cannot; I fail.—The King? Alain is now my King. Now there is nothing counts for me but love, nothing but love. . . . My father, he would consent, . . . I can myself pardon now, . . . it was that I did not know how hard——"

She stopped, and freed herself from my clasp. "My father, poor father!" she cried, with such an adjuration in her voice that I looked around, uncertain that we were still alone. "Yes, you shall me exempt, father,—it is a task too hard,—I am not a Jeanne Darc. . . . I am weak, I am sad of being lonely, my heart—it is thirsty—for a little of love! . . ."

I caught her to me, she was sobbing, I could feel the leap of her breath. "Come away—let us leave Brivac! See, you *shall* be my wife, my real wife,—it was no true

marriage to that wretch,—we can marry in France, I can be your husband here, it will be all the same. . . . Why should we wait? why should we deny ourselves?—come away with me, Blurette,—*Blurette!*”

And I pleaded on and on, for flight with me, for her lips, for her wifely arms, for the full gift, for all the sweetness that love might ask and answering love bestow. My fire and eagerness grew, they thrilled her, mastered her almost, she was yielding, maiden pride was dying, Blurette, *Blurette!*

Suddenly, swiftly, wrenchingly, she tore her mouth from mine and touched her fingers to my lips instead.

A moment in silence and aloofness she regarded me. “But no, *no!*” she said. “Your wife, it is Lois, it can never be Blurette. . . . I did not know. . . . I am forgetful,—she will claim you. . . . Oh, I must think, I must consider encore, I must arrange, . . . ah, we shall talk more of it first. . . . Not now, not *now*. . . . Oh go, mon Alain! . . . Go!”

She was keeping me back, with hands that pleaded more than they repelled, and again her eyes were fluent with tears. “No, *no!*” she cried, and before I could recapture and prevail, the door came open suddenly, and primly I had to step back, for we were no longer alone.

“The Major! The Major!” Widow Bonami panted, breathless with hurry and flurry. “I tell him wait, but he comes,—he will not himself arrest,—he is here,—mon dieu, how it is awkward, with M’sieur present!—and Ma’am’selle’s eyes!”

But Blurette’s eyes were dry again. She was behind the writing-table now, quite out of reach of me. “Go, *go!*” she whispered: but I stood stock-still.

“I won’t!” I said. “Not I!”

“Quick, quick! he will come, that officer so-terrible,”

the Widow panted. "Is it that M'sieur rests? . . . Ah well, me, then, I fly!" And, so to speak, she flew.

"I must again see you,—promise to come,—*promise!*" Blulette was whispering hurriedly, until with the most disconcerting and amazing swiftness, mime that she is, she changed her voice and her mood.

"Ah no, M'sieur the Englishman," she was saying now, with a cool suavity of manner that came upon me like an icy douche, "No, I cannot arrange it,—see you, I know not your affrightful language.—I like not the people Anglais, I am a coward of the sea! Very honoured, but I could not accept, no! . . . Bon jour, M'sieur!—tenez, what think you?—it is that the M'sieur Anglais invites me go sing at the concerts of London! Là, là, what promotion for little Blulette, hein? What think you of that? . . . Là! But me, I go not; ah no, parbleu!"

"I—I do not comprehend" . . . I stammered, and with a quick frown she answered; "A man, does he *ever* understand?" Then her frown changed into a smile, that seemed to rest on my shoulder.

I stared at her uncomprehendingly still, until I turned, and saw behind me, in the doorway stopped short and struck motionless at sight of me, that confounded grim, glum, blunderbore of a Groschaud. Then I understood, as a quicker man would have done earlier, and I bowed to him stiffly and waited for his accost. But he came past me quite contemptuously, and he lifted Blulette's fingers to his lips, confound him! . . .

She was smiling upon him, her welcome was almost thawing him; I could see it, and I cursed under my breath. "An actress consummate," I growled to myself. "She also would know how to play a man false!" And the Major was thinking as much, I fancy; for very louring was the look he turned upon me.

"M'sieur waits?" he questioned her.

"Ah no! it is settled, M'sieur,—it is finished!" Blulette said hurriedly, as she smiled across her table and made me a gesture of farewell. "I go not to London, me. It is very polished of M'sieur to offer, but no! . . . The pleasure to see M'sieur again,—some evening,—or at four hours, is it not?" And then, with a frowning little look full of meaning, she swept me an inexorable good-day.

I had to go, of course; and a very undignified exit I made of it, the contemptuous Major looking on. I stumbled at the threshold, came out clumsily, miserably; came out wretched and raging. I raged against Groschaud, against my own ineptitude and my impotency, my ill fate. I was wretched with love awakened, love yearning to the point of pain, and not assuaged. The battledore of circumstance had spanged me back from the goal.

XXIII

"For evil news rides post, while good news baits."

ONE of the mysteries so profound of life, as Father Ledru would say, is the way the body domineers. In novels, emotion and fasting are twin-born; but I don't believe it. A healthy man who dined badly yesterday—did not sup at all—dreamed passionately all night—and broke his fast with a mere ha'penny roll, is bound to feel hungry at lunch-time, no matter how angry or sorry or enamoured he may be. When I blundered out of the House of the Café, Time was pointing his finger towards the hour of déjeuner, Brivac was redolent of cookery, and a savage razor-edged appetite cut me my way to table under the chestnuts in the garden of the Lance. Yet I felt ashamed of this material hunger, and would not all at once confess it and give in: I took the longer way to the Lance, by the two roads that make an elbow at the market-place; and, turning the funny-bone of the elbow, I passed the Bureau of Gendarmery's yellow façade.

"Tiens, tiens!" my mind exclaimed at that moment, for whom should I see emerge from that repair of the sworded police but his Reverence the Abbé Ledru!

Now what the deuce should *he* be doing there? I stared at him suspiciously: but he gave me a low congée of his woolly black hat and a most engaging red-eyed smile.

"Eh, what? the civic wolf and the spiritual shepherd—the sabre and the crook?" said I. "How then, M'sieur l'Abbe? What means it, hey?"

He laughed. "From that which appears, dame, yes!" and he made a gleaming show of a workmanlike set of grinders. "To-day, for the first time, I visit a Bureau of Gendarmery,—absolutely for the first time, I assure M'sieur de Smit. M'sieur will comprehend that we priests love not the police so ungodly! But, on occasion, one must render unto Caesar,—M'sieur will comprehend?"

I nodded.

"It is M'sieur the Prefect," he went on to explain. "M'sieur the Prefect, he has demanded, by wire electric, informations about the so-sad affair of yesterday at Duramadour. The Commandant of Gendarmes, he has required my presence, to give the informations; behold all!"

"I see," said I. "Informations about the sermon, and the clever trick of that miraculous bell, eh?"

He winked; positively the Abbé winked. Yet, "Oh no," he said, "informations about the poor priest from Carcassonne."

"Ah, the good old curé," I mourned. "It saddens, to think that he is gone."

"But he died a saint," said Parson Ledru. "M'sieur agrees with me?"

"I am sure he did," said I.

"Ah, M'sieur is Protestant, which is grave; but M'sieur has not a heretic's heart,—M'sieur does not hate the priesthood. What then? Why should he? We are all brothers, eh?"

"Or step-brothers," I said.

"With the Bon Dieu for Father of all." And thus with godly conversation the Reverend Ledru made profitable my walk to the Rusty Lance.

"A letter attends M'sieur," said Pat importantly, as we crossed him in the courtyard of the inn. "A charged letter it is."

"Ah—where?"

"In the chamber historic. M'sieur Milor' probably goes there again himself to make clean? Behold the key! *More water?*" he grinned, and I shook a finger at him.

So Goss had sent the cash, thought I, as I mounted the stairs. "I can quit Brivac now!" I said to myself forgetfully; and then I added—"But I won't. . . . Perhaps it's only from Flapp, to tell me of his journey."

The letter made a white patch in the middle of my red tablecloth. The postmark was London S.W.; the emboss on the envelope was "The Westminster Hotel." I split the docketed envelope: a letter and six five-pound Bank of England notes fell out.

"Ah, now I can square with Flapp,—when I find him," I rejoiced. And I stuffed the notes into my ticket-pocket, and began to puzzle out a very unlaywer-like scrawl.

"*My dear man Tanger,*" Goss's scribble of a fist began, "*whatever French hole of a place have you got into now? I send the money, of course. Glad to have your whereabouts. You must keep me posted. I had advices from the States last mail, and rather fancy our man there may now be on the right track. He writes that*"——

I stopped my reading, even at that exciting point; I lowered the letter sharply, to stare at the panes in my door. Somebody had been there, outside,—the curtain hung only half-drawn; somebody had been peeping in at me,—Ledru, for a guinea!

The sly old devil-dodger, spying again! Of course he may have been on his way to Number Eight quite innocently; though I don't know why,—a dip of his fingers in the

lavabo on the court-yard-wall would be ablutions enough for him. . . . A friend that sticketh closer than a brother, this Ledru. And what, I wondered again, was he really doing at the Gendarmery?

"I had advices from the States last mail, and rather fancy our man there may now be on the right track. He writes that a Mr. Luke Tanger died in Brooklyn some little time back, and there was a daughter Louise: is tracing her up. Looks rather likely, don't you think? Louise and Lois, you see. I expect more by to-morrow's mail. Will write you prompt."

"My Jove! Louise and Lois—why not? I've always had a feeling that she's Amurrcan; though I don't know why: she hadn't the ghost of a twang.

"If she *is* American, it ought to be pretty easy to break the wedding-ring. Isn't there something about naturalisation before marriage? Goss will know. . . . Anyhow, divorce seems a ten minutes' job over there. . . . Bluettes, Bluettes, it may all come right after all!" It was thus I mused at table in the garden, and I must have been smiling at my thoughts. For—

"M'sieur de Smit is happy," said the Reverend Ledru, as he plucked and sucked at his artichoke. "M'sieur will have had good news in his letter?"

"What letter?" said I, like a fool. I turned on him point-blank, but of course he was not disconcerted.

"Am I, then, in error?" he smiled. "Surely I heard Patrice announce a letter? Also I perceived M'sieur reading one as I passed to my room."

The foxy fellow is 'cute enough to play his cards faced on the table. He knows that I almost caught him watching me, so he mentions it himself. The same thing with his somnambulising the other night, I expect. But I meet

him with his own weapons, he can hardly know that I think him a spy.

"And where's the brave Major, then?" the Abbé went on. "Déjeunes he not here to-day?" Indeed, the seat on my left was empty; I had hardly noticed it till then. But now at his words I was tingling with a mad jealousy, all in a minute. Ah! the fellow must be lingering at the House of the Café,—déjeuning with Bluette there, may be; they would be laughing together over the awkward Englishman,—curse the fellow's insolence! What kind of a rôle was Bluette acting now? "Là, là, là!" she cried, when I caught at her hand—her customary little cry of temporary repression, no doubt: Groschaud would have heard it before me,—curse him! . . . Jealousy and unfaith took possession of me as I ruminated. For what *was* Bluette, after all? A chanteuse, a café-girl, one of a clan of light women, a beguiler by vocation, a——

"Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high place of the city. Whoso is simple, let him turn in thither. With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield; with the flattering of her lips he goeth after her straightway."

It must have been the sight of the Abbé's breviary, lying piously ready near his plate, that put these horrible citations into my head.

I set down knife and fork; my fine hunger was about to be cheated. I believe I should have forthwith rushed to the House of the Café had not Groschaud almost the next moment appeared. He approached us, and the sight of him gave me a pang of remorse. He was late because, no doubt, some military duty had beset him on his way—she could not have kept him in the House of the Café so long.

Remorse stirred at my heart, I say. "I don't deserve

the girl!" I growled at myself; "I'm become the jealous kind of fool, now,—she *had* to give him audience, on 'wine-business,' of course. . . . But she sent him off as soon as she could, and off, too, in the very deuce of a temper!" For his nod was of the curtest as he came to table and savagely sat himself down.

"Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, for a gracious woman retaineth honour. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, she will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. Strength and honour are her clothing, she openeth her mouth with wisdom, he shall rejoice in time to come." . . . The breviary was speaking now in sweeter tones.

I watched Groschaud; he was using his knife on his fish in a most cutting and stabbing fashion. The sight of the man's chagrin gave a fillip to my appetite, and I made a decent meal after all.

He said no word until we were alone together. The priest and the voyagers of commerce were gone; the Major was gnawing a chicken bone, and I was paring a peach. Then, "M'sieur is still in Brivac?" he growled abruptly.

"Yes,—from what appears," said I.

"But sacrédieu! M'sieur makes error to stay. Brivac is dangerous for M'sieur."

I went on peeling my peach.

"M'sieur goes to leave Brivac soon, is it not? Since Ma'am'selle declines to sing in England. . . . M'sieur departs soon?"

"Soon enough, I dare say." My indifference seemed to white-heat his latent ire; but he held himself in,—it was not till later in the day that he let himself go.

Yet he warned me,—I will remember that to his credit; though he could not know through what special door the danger to me was to come. Yesterday I might have quickened my exit because of his fresh warning; but

this afternoon,—my Jove, what a day may bring forth ! . . . Yesterday I was fussing with impatience to get away from Brivac, and now——

Now I may go away feet foremost, a fool of the most useless variety,—a dead fool ! . . .

The possibility of the damnable thing I discovered this afternoon was a continent wide of any conjecture of mine just then, and it seemed a point of honour to sit on at table and show the man that I meant to sit tight at Brivac. A couple of jealous asses, we kept there side by side, without speaking another word, he noisily eating his dessert and I smoking doggedly ; neither of us would be the first to move.

But Patrice broke the awkwardness for us. “A dispatch telegraphic for M'sieur Milor’.” He presented the telegram with quite a flourish : I tore the bluish folds.

The message was from Goss. He must have sent it off from London some thirty hours behind the letter. “*Great news,*” the gummed-on tape began—“*Great news, am coming to you straight, don't stir till I arrive.—Goss.*”

“Bring me the Indicator of the Roads of Iron, acushla,” I said to Patrice hastily ; and as I spoke the Major rose and stalked away, without a bow.

Great news, eh ? What news ? It is a tantalising message. But surely it must mean that the new man in the States has traced Mistress Lois Amaury to her covert. “I must tell Blulette ! I must tell Blulette !” my heart cried out at once ; and then my caution—such as it is—said, “Better be sure of it first, man !”

Why in the name of patience couldn't the fellow be explicit ? His lawyer's habits again ! It is even suspicious of him to take the trouble to come. How long before he's here ? thought I. What a thundering while Pat was taking over the time-table !

Pat came at last. "It is that I was delayed," he explained, as I snatched the book. "Tenez a little, M'sieur—somebody wants M'sieur Milor'!"

"Yes, yes," I said, inattentive; I was deep in the folio pages of the French *Bradshaw*, that prodigious volume.

"It is that some one desires to see M'sieur," Pat insisted.

"Yes, yes: Calais—Paris: Paris—Limoges: 10.50 to——"

Pat put his mouth quite close to my ear. "It is that a man in the courtyard demands to be received by M'sieur! " he almost shouted.

I looked up at that. "An Englishman?" I said eagerly. Could Goss be here already?

"Bigrement, no!" said Pat contemptuously. "Just a nobody at all. Just simply a bonhomme of a little cultivator. From a village! Wishes M'sieur that I send him walking?"

"But no," I said. "Why should you send him walking?"

Pat pursed his lips. "It is just simply a nobody—that's all. One of those peasants. From a village. A thick-head. Wishes M'sieur that I bring him in here?"

"Certainly I do," said I.

"And the cart? And the pony?"

"Oh, there's a cart and a pony? Well, I'll go out to them." And I went.

I went: I was shuttlecock again, and into what a curst quandary to be driven!

XXIV

"Unfortunate by an enigmatical sort of calamity."

PAT'S bonhomme of a petty cultivator was perched and huddled on the seat-board of a rusty little old market-cart, behind an aged yellow pony that stood with drooped head and shaky fore-legs on the cobble-stones of the courtyard of the Lance. The wizened old peasant showed me a tanned face under a torn straw hat and a mat of brindled hair; his black blouse only half hid a pair of trousers fearfully and wonderfully patched; in attitude and expression he rather resembled his pony. He seemed to enjoy more than his fair share of the stolid, sententious, dull gravity of the peasant folk of the Limousin, and even with Pat's impetuous assistance I found it hard to get an inkling of his errand.

"Behold the rich English Milor'!" Pat had announced.

"Ben! ben, then! Bees and purple," the bonhomme wheezed.

"Bees and purple? . . . *Bees and purple?*" . . . I stared at Pat inquiringly. "What on earth does the old fellow mean?"

Pat shrugged his shoulders. "I told M'sieur Milor'!" said he; and then, "Death of my life, old fool, what is it? What dost thou want?"

Was this the English Mossieur? the bonhomme wanted to know. Very well, then, ben! Bees and purple! . . .

"It is a turnip-head, M'sieur. It is an ass-poll; it is a sacré lunatic!" Pat cried, his shoulders up to his ears. "Better talk to the pony, my faith!"

I smiled, but tried the man again. Ben! The English Mossieur was to mount himself in the voiture, immediate. Because of time. It was six kilomètres. To Vignols. Bees and purple!

"But why?" I wanted to know. What did it mean? Who had sent him?

Dame! he didn't know. It was a Mossieur. Bees and purple!

"But *what* Monsieur? What kind of a Monsieur?"

The old man looked cunning. Dame! He couldn't tell. Just a Mossieur. . . . Bees and purple!

I never dreamed the meaning of it. It seemed just possible that the old fellow might have come from Goss; Goss might be at some lawyer-trick or other. So, "What am I wanted for?" said I.

Dame! He didn't know. Not his business, that. I was to mount. Immediate. Because of time. *Bees and purple!*

"But say, then, ass-poll! Say, then, species of a badly-brought-up pig! Why for. Should M'sieur Milor'. Go with thee. To Vignols?" Pat mocked him.

Dame! He didn't know. . . . *Bees and purple!*

Pat swore, Pat shrugged his shoulders almost higher than his ears. "Ah, these peasants!" said he, himself no doubt a peasant's son. "Tenez, M'sieur, permit that I send the old pig of a fool promenading!"

"Not at all, not at all, mon ami. Why should you? I go. Bees and purple for ever, Pat,—whatever it may mean." I meant to go with the goodman. Why not? But "Bigrement blue!" shrugged Pat, as I mounted.

I mounted. Why not? "Why not?" has been my word through life—a lax conceding motto. "What for?"

is the phrase for a man who means to rough-ride circumstances and master the kicking event. I went to Vignols with the bonhomme. Why not? There were excellent reasons why not, had I known.

"Hué, Bichette!" My wizened little Jehu got an amazing pace out of that old yellow pony. We scorched up the boulevard at such a rate that a priest, who was shadily seated under a peeling platane, lifted his eyes from his breviary to regard us. The Reverend Ledru, of course.

"Hué, Bichette!" We were bound for Vignols-the-Village, the bonhomme said. There are two Vignols, it seems: the other is Vignols-the-Gare. Skeleton poplars and anachronistic telegraph-posts fringe the road; it lies near the railway for about a league, and then turns south for a mile. Vignols-the-Village huddles itself together under mighty chestnut-trees that lift the bushes of their russet leafage stiff and stirless against the metallic sky. By now it was nearly two o'clock and the furnace of afternoon was in blast; I longed for my siesta. The cots and steadings of Vignols-the-Village seemed to dance in the heat like parched peas. Over the doorways hung last year's harvest-bushes, faded ribbons dangling from besom-like clumps of empty straw; I almost expected to see them catch fire in the sunshine. The pony turned in under one of them, we jolted into a cramped farmyard, and came to a stand between an antique manure-heap and its neighbour, the farmstead door. Ouf! the sky was blue fire; with a pant of relief I got down into shadow.

The kitchen I entered was low and cool and dark. A greenish light filtered into it past the vine-leaves which curtained its one small window eyeing the village street. The door we opened let in a triangular patch of hot sunshine upon the floor of beaten clay, but the bonhomme shut and locked it, and its closing left us in the dark green

light again. I had the sensation of standing in a cellar dairy, as "*Bees and purple!*" the bonhomme said.

A man was sitting there, his face to the little window and his back to myself. In the momentary gleam that entered with me I had seen him to wear a peasant's high black cap; it was pulled low on his nape, above a black blouse too small; between his cap and the collar of his blouse ran a fleshy bar of very swarthy or very filthy neck. He did not turn nor even stir as we entered. He sat there steadily, a mass of darkness, enigmatical. I felt uneasy at the look of him, and inquiringly I turned to my guide.

"*Bees and purple!*" said the bonhomme again. "The *Mossieur Anglais!*" and then the other lumbered round from his chair, and came at me embracingly. "Goes it well, Mr. Tanger?" he said.

"My Jove! is it *you?*"

It was the preposterous Flapp.

"Flapp! What the dickens,—" but he sh-shed at me hastily, and "No names, no names! Did you see a gendarme outside?" he whispered,—"*did you?*"

Your born conspirator's habit of mind is quite a psychical study. I have known two or three of the kidney: they are a genus apart. Your born conspirator mopes and flags unless he breathes the heady air of real or fancied danger: he dreads discovery, but would be unhappy if he knew himself quite safe. Disguise and subterfuge are not alone the tools, but the fond conditions of his craft. Knowing himself surveyed, he plots rejoicingly: ignore or disregard him, and he ceases to care to spin his webs; a mild degree of danger is the meat and drink with which he feeds his self-importance. For the egregious Flapp to lurk in cap and blouse in that dark kitchen was nothing less than pure delight. Blest above all other men of stratagems, he had his dam blackness as well as his plotting to conceal. "See

how infernally subtle I am!" were the words in his mind, as his eyes begged approbation from mine.

He turned the bonhomme out of the kitchen, locked the door, wedged a chair against it, and stood fast against the chair while he talked. At times, however, he would cross the room and perilously mount upon the flour-bin, to peer between the vine-leaves and spy for gendarmes posted in the road.

I humoured the man, of course; indeed, the absurdity of him was delightful. He talked unendingly. Yes, my letter had reached him, he said; but,—and here he swelled alarmingly with pride, or seemed to do so in the gloom—there were marks suspicious on the envelope, and long experience had taught him to read infallibly in those marks the hand of the sworded police! Then a mouchard!—several mouchards,—in fact, about a dozen mouchards,—had watched him all through his stay at Angoulême! Oh yes! He chuckled as he told me how he had outwitted them: how openly he had booked himself to Paris: how ostentatiously he had taken the window-seat in the Paris express: and how consumedly he had laughed when the rapide carried him through Brivac, where doubtless other mouchards lay for him in wait. At Limoges, how deftly had he slipped from one standing train, across the six foot, into another! Into the standing omnibus train, which would carry him back quite near to Brivac, after all! Oh, he had worked out the perfect plan of it all on the Indicator, at Angoulême, he boasted. And again his eyes appealed to mine for praise.

Vignols-the-Gare is the station nearest Brivac; he had footed it on as far as Vignols-the-Village. To house in the auberge would have been a dangerously simple thing that the most elementary and neophytic conspirator would eschew. With a bribe he had slunk into the bonhomme's

cottage: he despatched to me the bonhomme, and he would not have been a happy adept could he have done so commonplace a thing as send me a written message. Hence the "bees and purple"—that cryptic allusion to Napoleon and Empire,—was it sufficiently cleverly veiled? was it well thought of,—hein? . . . And the bonhomme, who did not understand, and the pony that couldn't—why, they were exquisite details in his so-masterly plan!

"Very smart indeed," said I. "But why all this risk and trouble? I've resigned. If it's the money you've come for——?"

Oh no, he had no anxiety about the money, the money was safe with M'sieur Tanger,—Duvert had guaranteed that. Oh no, he had come to urge me to get him an interview with Groschaud: did I think that he, Auguste Flapp, conspirator and diplomat, was going to give up?—at the first attempt?

"It's simply no use," I said. "You might as well have gone straight on to Paris. Not the least good to tackle the Major again. Another wine-merchant's been beforehand with us, bless her! If the Major turns coat at all, it will be for the King."

"King! *Zat* for ze King!" My late employer snapped his fingers furiously. "Zee you, you shall ze brav' Major here bring to me, Auguste Flapp,—zis night. I shall him persuade, I shall him offer plenty more money, zousands of money,—yes!"

"Money won't buy him," said I.

Oh, but it would,—money would buy anybody, he told me; and at that I winced. Zee now, Groschaud should have money up to half a million francs—twenty zousand pounds. Let the good Mr. Tanger bring ze brav' Major to ze skilful Auguste Flapp, and all should go well.

"Not I, my faith!" I said. "I'm done with your

business, I tell you. I'm going to give you the whole thing back ; I won't insult the man any more."

"What dam nonsense !" Flapp's words pop out.

"But he refuses,—I tell you he refuses altogether," said I, getting tart. "Here's his letter to prove it," and I slipped my fingers into the breast-pocket of my coat. "My Jove !" My hand came out again, empty. I clutched and stared.

"Ze letter, zen ! Give it me !" Flapp's eyes were small as they regarded me. "Ze letter !"

But I was fumbling in my pockets, one by one.

"Dame ! why you not give me ze letter ?"

"I,—I *can't* !" I said ; "I'm afraid it's gone !" Hurriedly I pressed my fingers upon my waistcoat ; the usual crisp rustle answered, but no envelope was outlined there. Of course not ; I had never put the letter in the pocket where I kept the notes.

"Gone ! *what* you zay ? Gone !" He wobbled with excitement.

"Lost, dropped, stolen, or something, confound it !" I growled, as I thrust my hand into my breast-pocket again. "It was in here yesterday !"

Then the mulatto frothed over, and I had to listen to unpleasant words. . . . "Lost ! What a duffer ! what a dam duffer !" he ended, out of breath.

"You're right about that," said I. "A duffer I am, my Jove !"

"Zat dam Duvert, he zay you one smart man !"

"Duvert's too polished," said I, fumbling again. . . . "I had the thing yesterday, right as rain. But it's gone now—yes, sure enough, it's gone !"

"*Gone !*" the mulatto piped. "What nonsense,—gone ! How could it ? Ah, I not believe you—I not believe you ever have it ; one flam !"

"Confound you!—do you say I'm lying?" I stood threateningly towards him, and he began to pant and tremble.

Ah well, zen, no quarrel; let Mr. Tanger give him ze twenty-zousand francs, and ze rest of ze expense money,—what not spent. He, Auguste Flapp, conspirator skilful, would himself negotiate with Groschaud. Yes, ze notes,—at once, please, zis minute!

"With all the pleasure in the world—jolly glad to get rid of 'em. I am going to give you every penny, man, don't fear!" Ragingly I unbuttoned my waistcoat and sent my fingers diving into the secret pocket. And then, a minute later——

"Ah, tief! Ah, zwindler! You have ze money spent! You have it zwindled!" Flapp was flopping up and down the dark kitchen in a fury. "Ah, voleur! Ah, convict! Va!"

And I could not take him by the neck and fling him out. For in my money-pocket was nothing but a wad of crackly tissue-paper; Flapp's thousand-franc and five-pound notes were gone.

XXV

"Locks, bolts, and bars soon fly asunder."

"**M**AZETTE! but it is stupefying, this!" Pat cried.

"Isn't it!" said I.

"M'sieur cannot have locked the door,—he *cannot*, my oath!" The Commandant of Gendarmes clinked the spurred heels of his blue legs together and stood at frown.

"Why should you talk like that?" said I. "I tell you I am certain I did!"

"M'sieur suspects not the household of the Lance, I trust?" snapped Madame.

"My faith, I know not whom I suspect," I gloomed.

"Nobody but M'sieur and me ever enters the Number Seven," Pat lamented.

"I'm not so certain of that," said I.

"My oath, a peculiar affair," said the Commandant of Gendarmes.

"A most annoying affair for the Lance," Madame very peevishly cried.

"Madame will comprehend that it is more annoying for *me*."

And there we stood, the four of us, suspicious, irritable, glum, in the chamber historic, the King and the Pope and the Field-Marshal placidly looking on. . . .

The money must be somewhere in my bedroom,—*must*

be, I had told Flapp the infuriate. "I shall bring it you all right," I said when I left him. "It shall be made good to you, anyhow!" I shouted back through the half-open kitchen door. But it will eat up a quarter of my petty capital to make that promise good.

A train for Brivac was due at Vignols-the-Gare in ten minutes, the gendarme told me,—for a gendarme there was, out in the street, after all. I raced for that train, and stumbled breathless into it; ten minutes, and the train was at Brivac; ten minutes more, and I was searching my room.

I searched in vain. I called in Patrice, but he was no more fortunate. We called in Madame, and she sent to the Gendarmes' Bureau.

The Commandant of Gendarmes came himself, his own important decorative self. I suspect the Commandant of sheep's-eyes for my buxom hostess; he echoes or endorses every word she says. And Madame was tart with the break in her siesta, and touchy for the fair fame of the Lance.

"It was foolish of M'sieur to keep such value in his pockets," she told me.

"My oath, it was foolish. Madame has reason," the Commandant agreed.

"Madame has," I allowed.

"As always," said the Commandant, gallant with a bow and a clink of his very martial spurs.

"M'sieur will understand that the Lance cannot be held responsible," she frowned.

"My oath, by the laws of France,"—how a Frenchman swells when he mouthes the name of his country,—"by the laws of France, Madame is not responsible for the loss," the Commandant assured me.

"I know it; you push at an open door," I snapped.

I had told them nothing about the vanishing of the letter. The loss of a letter is a simple thing,—easily it

jolts out of a pocket or slips to the ground when one stoops—I had mentioned the missing notes alone. And yet the point of honour makes the loss of the letter almost the more vexing. It was left in my charge, I had been careless over it, my neglect might compromise Groschaud, —he might think I did it maliciously. His secret, that “wine-merchants” were nibbling at him, lies at the mercy of any finder, somewhere in Brivac streets or along the Vignols’ road. . . . *Groschaud would think I had done it to damn him with Blulette.*

Confound the letter! Confound the whole pack of angering perverse circumstances! Oh, curse the letter! And yet, but for it there would have been for me no day at Duramadour, no chance to rescue Blulette, no uniting flight with her across the upland, no learning to care for her, no hope of her arms. . . .

“My Jove!” I cried, with sudden reflection. “Not a word about this outside,—you hear me, Madame, Commandant, Patrice! I can’t have all Brivac know: not a word about this outside!”

Mine hostess looked at me suspiciously. “Rest tranquil,” she said, “one is not so stupid as that! It would almost appear that,—M’sieur is quite sure, then, that,—is it *certain* that the money has been lost by M’sieur?”

“Parbleu!” I growled, for her suspicions had ceased to be tacit; “one is not more certain of death, Madame.”

“It is most unfortunate for the Lance,” she grumbled. “The Lance is an hotel of reputation spotless.”

“Of reputation spotless!” her echo said. “But M’sieur may well have made his loss outside?”

“Ah yes, cristi! it is that!” Pat cried. “See now, that badly-brought-up pig of a peasant! With his bees and purples!”

"Impossible!" I said. "Regard, now." I took off coat and waistcoat. "Behold the pocket so-hidden, observe the tight button, consider this wad of paper, folded to the shape and the size. It takes long, all that, you comprehend,—one does not manage all that in a minute, eh? Think you I should not feel the hand of the thief in all that?"

Pat rubbed his red head. "M'sieur has reason, mazette!"

"Agree with me now, Madame, Commandant!—agree that the theft must have been made at leisure here, in my chamber, all at leisure while I slumber, my waistcoat off. . . . Tenez, is it not reasonable, that which I say? I slumber, the thief enters, he has leisure, and *crack*! behold my twenty-two thousand francs all gone!"

"Fichtre!" Pat cried. "I me remember well. The door, it *was* locked! It was locked to his coffee this morning, as always. M'sieur opened to me, M'sieur had slept thick, he did not the thunder hear; M'sieur was excited, M'sieur sang, he was gay,—M'sieur expected——"

"Yes, yes," I stopped him hurriedly. "That's so, Pat, I remember well."

"But the vest of M'sieur, it was not under his pillow this morning,—as other days."

"My Jove, you're right, Pat,—it wasn't,—it was on the back of that chair." I pointed, and the Commandant stared at the chair severely. "I remember now,—I took off my coat and waistcoat while I was writing,—because of the heat last night. But I'm sure I locked the door."

"Was *this* the chair that received the garments of M'sieur?" the Commandant asked.

"Oh, never mind which chair!" snapped Madame. "Better think about the window."

"My oath, yes!—the window," said the Commandant.

"Madame has reason. The window! Of course, the window!"

"But I keep the window hasped at night," I objected. "Hasped across the crack that lets in air. Nobody could get in at the window without my hearing 'em."

"My oath, but it is mysterious, this,—I shall not understand it." And the Commandant of Police wagged his wiseacre head. Fiercely moustachioed, brilliant with blue and white trimmings, spurred like a dragoon, crowned with the chapeau of an Admiral, girt with a General's sword, the Commandant is the most effulgent of thief-catchers, but much more decorative than effectual. It was not the Commandant who divined by what contrivance my room had been burgled; that discovery was made by Father Ledru.

The Abbé hummed the "Ave Verum" as he came along the gallery on his way to Number Eight. His step slowed as he advanced, and paused altogether outside my room when he saw there the conjunction of Madame, the Commandant, and myself.

"How then?" he queried. "But this is intriguing! I am curious. Permit that I enter, M'sieur. Madame, Messieurs! Is it that M'sieur is unhappily taken sick?"

"Mon dieu, worse than that!" said Madame. "It is that M'sieur considers himself robbed, mon père. Robbed! At the Lance!"

"Eh? What?" The Abbé showed the liveliest astonishment. "Robbed? But doubtless M'sieur the Commandant is on the clue?"

"My oath, no!" the Commandant grumbled. "It is not so facile as all that! Listen if it is," and he stated the puzzle.

The Abbé listened to the end. Then he said, "It is simple, quite simple—M'sieur did not lock his door. As on the night I somnambuled."

"But yes, I did. I've turned the key ever since," said I. "I took warning from you, Abbé."

"Tenez, the key—it turns very easy?" The Abbé had been experimenting. "It makes little sound,—why, it makes none! And behold how it is oily!" He had drawn the key out, and now showed it, wet and shiny with oil. "The wards of the lock must be all dripping," he went on. "Ah, *ah*, I remember!" He rapped the key upon his forehead, and left a blackish little mark there. "Ah, I recall, I recall,—*ah*, it is that!—ah yes!"

"But what then, *mon père*?" asked Madame.

"It is just a little secret, confided to me by a poor thief. In confession, you will comprehend,—in the confessional. Behold now, see how this key peeps out of the lock, outside the door. Ah well, then, how easy to take hold with pincers or a tube, and turn it, from out there? When the lock is well-oily like this! Oh, it is simple,—it is a trick quite known."

"M'sieur the Abbé is learned in such tricks," I said.

He turned to me with suave forbearance. "Ah, M'sieur! a doctor of the soul learns many evil things—too many for his peace. The world is full of wickedness, M'sieur!"

"My oath, it is," the gendarme sighed. "But M'sieur l'Abbé has discovered it,—that was the trick! My oath, how clever!" and he gazed at the priest with almost adoring admiration.

"M'sieur de Smit will know the numbers of the notes, no doubt?" the Abbé said.

"Oh yes, I had sense enough for that."

"Then M'sieur the Commandant goes at once to announce the theft and proclaim the numbers, eh?" said the priest, with his eyes on mine.

"My oath, yes. To proclaim the numbers. 'Turally, yes," the Commandant echoed.

"Wait a minute,—advertise the numbers? . . . No no, I can't have that," I said . . . "I lose the money, that's all, if I must. . . . No, I can't have the affair made public, —no!"

"*Ah!*" The Abbé's intonation was profound: the Commandant echoed it: Madame repeated it on a shriller key: and even Patrick stared at me doubtingly. "No, I won't have a public fuss!" I insisted: for I had to think of Groschaud,—and of conspirator Flapp as well, confound him!

"*Ah!*" the Abbé emphasised again, "I regret that I can advise nothing more. Madame! Messieurs!" And the Reverend Ledru bowed himself out, rather coldly. He had ceased to believe in the loss of the notes.

So had two of the others: I think Pat remained loyal. "M'sieur has other money, I hope?" said Madame, very freeingly: she was anxious about her bill.

"Of course I have. Behold it," and I took the six crumpled five-pound notes that Goss sent me, out of my ticket-pocket.

"*Matin!*" cried Pat. "What richness! What is a loss to a milor' like this? But M'sieur locks the door and takes the key out to-night, is it not?"

"I do, Pat,—begor I do." And that for the time was the end of the money matter. I shall have to make good the twenty thousand francs, and the hundred pounds as well, if I live and can manage it. If I die, Goss will arrange it out of my little capital at home. I am leaving him written instructions for that.

So now I put the money matter out of my thoughts. Sufficient for the night is the evil thereof, and a worse thing happened this evening.

XXVI

"Why should not Conscience have vacation,
As well as the other courts of the Nation?"

I T was getting on for five o'clock before I was free of that bedroom bother. "At four hours, is it not?" Blulette had said, with an underlining little frown, this morning, but I was more than half an hour behind time when I took the boulevard road. I was late, I might miss her; the heat and the loss of my siesta irritated me, the exasperation of Flapp's outrageous manner abided with me, and the thought of the vanished letter and notes gnawed like a physical pain. It was in anything but a self-satisfied and hopeful mood that I approached the Café of the Comedy.

But the moment I reached the terrace my depression and mortification fled. Blulette was there! Blulette was there! She smiled on me, welcomed me, she was joyous and radiant and tender, her face was alight, her hand lingered in mine, there was a caress in each of her words. "Ah, how I waited, how I longed!" she murmured, as she gave me room at her table under the wisteria-vine. Coolness lay within that silvery shadow, peace was diffused from her gracious presence, and surely it was a draught for thirsty gods that the rosy fingers of Widow Bonami bestowed.

Depression and mortification were for other tenants of the terrace, not for me. Groschaud was absent, bless him ! but the Capitaine-Trésorier, the Capitaine-Instructeur, a Hussar officer, and a subaltern of Dragoons were assembled there. A minute earlier they had been a ring of chattering adorers around Mademoiselle and Madame ; but now their circle was broken : an Englishman, with the cool impertinence of his race, had cut in and cut them out. They sat glum : they frowned, they fumed. " Ah well, me, I go," the subaltern of Dragoons grumbled aloud, getting noisily out of his chair and straightening his ugly uniform. " Me, I depart," he said, as he took up his ponderous brass helmet and reached for his sword.

" Nay, then, rest, my poor Antoine," laughed the Hussar officer, glorious in his tunic of cerulean blue. " Rest thee, my old one,—M'sieur the Englishman is well-polished, he goes not to monopolise,—na, ma parole !" and he pulled the tetchy Dragoon back into his chair. " Consider thyself lucky to be here at all, my old one,—that poor Groschaud, *he* cannot, the Colonel retains him. Heavens, how he will morbleu !"

The Dragoon looked round at me with something like a grin. " M'sieur permits ?" he said ironically.

" Of course M'sieur permits,—M'sieur is English, but a gallant man," the Hussar answered for me. " Tenez, I warrant Ma'am'selle will consent to sing to us a little, if thou wilt ask her prettily, Antoine, my old bear."

" Ah, if Ma'am'selle would ! One chanson, only a little one ?" the Capitaine-Instructeur cooed. " The love of song, it is international,—France may enjoy it with England, unselfish, if Ma'am'selle would ?"

" But, M'sieur !" blushed Blulette,—how proud these

hints had made my heart, how bright they had made her face!—"But, Messieurs,—for the singing, it is not the hour!"

"All hours and every hour to listen to Ma'am'selle!" bowed the Hussar.

"Yet,—if Madame permits?" Blurette went on.

"How, then? But certainly. Chant, my mignonne! But certainly, yes."

"And if M'sieur"—Blurette's eyes caressed me,—"*it is that the piano is covered,—if M'sieur would be so polite*"——

I caught at her plan. The interior of the Café was empty: we were alone there for the while. "To-night I part from Brivac," she whispered, as I pulled the dusty holland off the piano.

"Oh no,—not so soon? I must see you again,—and again!"

"You wish it, mon ami? Me also. To-morrow, then—in the evening, at the Château de Thanneguy,—the lodge of it. Demand me of Tante Servais. . . . To-morrow, in the evening . . . oh, do not fail! Promise, *promise that you will come!*"

"Mon dieu, Blurette, it is not a hard thing to promise! I shall come, and I shall claim you—to-morrow!"

"Good, good!" She raised her voice as her fingers began to ripple over the keys. "Remember, now! To-morrow—Tante Servais—Château de Thanneguy—evening,—remember! Now remove thyself, Alain—to the terrace—and sit where thou canst not me see,—for I shall sing to thee,—and I shall . . . blush" . . .

I left her there: my feet trod light to the music as I sought the terrace again. The lap of the preluding wavelets grew into the breaking surge of a sea of dying sound:

and then the sweetness of her voice came floating out on the hearkening air—

“Il y a longtemps, ami,
Longs temps que je t'aime,
Jamais, plus jamais
Ma vie sera-t'elle gai :
Mais mon cœur bat toujours
Tout à toi de même,
Jamais, jamais
Je ne t'oublierai !”

It was a wailing little song of severance and farewell.

“But only till to-morrow !” I told myself, with a thud of the heart. . . . Ah, but *to-morrow* ! She does not know—I did not, then—how prophetic her song might be ! . . .

The minors of the final cadence of the last sad verse sank so low that sound all but died. But then, reviving, it modulated, swelled, and marched in serried chords of triumph as her voice burst gloriously out.

“Matine !” the Capitaine-Instructeur cried, beating time with his gloves ; for it was a martially-amorous chanson that she was singing to us now—

“Je dirai au Roi Henri
Reprenez votre Paris !
J'aime mieux l'ami au gué !
J'aime mieux mon mari !”

I was to be her husband,—the husband for whom she would sacrifice Groschaud, her mission at Brivac, her ambition, her loyalism,—all ; that was what her song meant to her and to me. The stirring old ditty, that tells of ambition foregone and the world well lost for love, rang to its jubilant close ; there came one crashing chord, then silence, then the outbreak of our applause. And none of them cried “Bis !” so loudly as I.

But we shouted "Bis!" in vain : though presently we were quiet, listening and waiting for more song. The terrace was now so still that the reverberation of each beat of the battoirs wielded by the washing-women under the red-roofed shed on the edge of the river below-bridge came distinct and shot-like to the ear. But we were silent in vain ; no song repaid our listening.

"Tenez, I go and peep," said the Hussar ; and he stole to the door of the saloon. "It is finished," he said, returning. "Ma'am'selle is vanished—gone ! It is finished, my infants : N,I—NI—fini ! No more songs this afternoon."

"She gave you two," said the Widow. "And not a sou in the shell for one ! It is too cheap, Messieurs. Now the mignonne goes to rest herself, for the songs of to-night. Enough, be not unreasonable."

"Ah well, then, ma belle, apport to me a porto," said the Hussar. "And me a pipperment-menthol,—for the stomach," said the Dragoon.

"Good, good : and for M'sieur the Angliche ?"

"Nothing more, Madame, I thank you . . . Messieurs ! Madame !" I rose and lifted my hat. And as I walked up the terrace and down the steps, "She sang only for the Angliche, my infants," I heard the Hussar say, and proud I was at the hearing. "Ah, the so-popular Groschaud, he would be malcontent at that—hein ?"

My heart was big with pride and love. *Bluette, Bluette ! To-morrow ! . . .* A fig for Groschaud, let him be malcontent if he chooses,—and a fig for all my worries, Flapp and the lost letter, and the cash to pay, and all. . . .

To-morrow, to-morrow ! *Bluette and to-morrow !*

→ I trod the gravel lightly as though I footed air, and I waved a gay salute to the statued Marceau as I passed. Young and buoyant and victorious he looked, in his gallant

pose on his pedestal; and I was young and buoyant again, and soon to be victor myself. To-morrow! Blurette and to-morrow! . . . "Jamais, jamais, je ne t'oublierai!"

Long shadows of lindens laid themselves at my feet, like palms in a progress of triumph, as I neared the public garden: they were shadows, and the shadows were raven and sinuous, but I read no omen in that. I saw no darkness lie across the primrose path of to-morrow. The magic of passionate love enwrapped me; at last I was certain of the heart's laurel, I would crop it and bind it on my brows a crown,—to-morrow! And who should bar me from it? . . . *Lois?*

Bah! Lois should not count! To-morrow, to-morrow evening at the château! Let Lois Amaury claim me, before she claimed my fidelity! To-morrow, to-morrow with Blurette, at the château! Groschaud? Poor beggar of a brave soldier, I could pity him now. What was it he warned me? "I will not have you stopping in Brivac making love to Mademoiselle." But, my poor good Major, I stop not in Brivac, I; I depart. Love-making in Brivac is over: to-morrow, to-morrow evening,—at the château,—with Blurette!

Love's rendezvous, at a château! Melodrama the thought, maybe, but none the less romance. Who has not dreamed of beauty bending to him, in some dim light auroral or crepuscular, from the oriel or lanceolate of a château? A hand to kiss and seize, a foothold in the wall, a carven sill to cross to the rosy dimness within! . . . Gautier dreamed it superbly.

"*It will be evening when we meet,*" he wrote,—"*at the sumptuous couching of the sun the sky will shine with the clear orange and green that one sees in old pictures: a broad alley will lead me, under chestnuts in flower and*

immemorial elms dove-haunted: here and there statues and marble urns will rise: the swan on the lake will splash and play with its own silver copy. Far at the end of all, the château, red and gray as in the days of Henri Quatre, peaked of roof, tall of chimney, a vane at every gable, windows narrow and high. And at one of the windows." . . . I have no heart to tell the further dream. . . . To-morrow at the château? It may never hap.

This afternoon I was so rapt in that dream that I blundered up against two people who came together out of the public garden, meeting me under the bee-inhabited limes. "Pardon,—I demand pardon!" I apologised, and then I smiled: for the two were Father Ledru and the gorgeous policeman again. "Eh, what?" I said. "The spiritual and the civic colloque?"

"Dame!" said the priest, "we were even talking of you, M'sieur de Smit—we spoke of your loss so-mysterious. It can't have been a common thief, that. There may be spies about you, M'sieur."

"I believe there are," I said, and I looked at him significantly.

"Dame, yes! Spies everywhere under this beautiful Republic," the Abbé lamented. "See you, now, I should not wonder if you might not recover your bank-notes at Paris."

"At Paris, eh? . . . Is it that you wish me out of Brivac?"

"Frankly, I do, M'sieur de Smit. For your good health. And for your money."

"Ah well, then, I tell you no! I am here, and here I rest. A fico for your spies, and a fig—the pip of a fig,—for the money!" I was snapping my fingers, I was flipping my hand, I was gesticulating like a very Frenchman, such is the influence of climate and environment on an

impressionable ass like me. But the Commandant cut me short.

"Tiens, tiens! behold who rides yonder so quick!"

He was gazing past me into the Square, and I turned. Light was coruscating adown the path across the Grande Place: the sun lit dazzlingly on bicycle wheels that flashed along the road towards the bridge. "It is Ma'am'selle Bluette!" the Commandant said. "My oath, how she rides swift, how she goes clever!"

She saw us: a wave of the hand from the lithesome dashing rider saluted me: I swept my hat to the ground, my eyes tracked after her amorously. . . . To-morrow, to-morrow at the château, Bluette!

"'Twould tire thy stout legs to catch her up, Commandant!" the Abbé said. "A good girl, that, M'sieur. For a chanteuse it is a straight kind of chanteuse. Think you not so, M'sieur de Smit?" he quizzed.

But I was watching the lithe skirted figure flash up the steep curve of the old bridge, under the tall iron crucifix that bends from the middle arch. All the grace of the heel-over of a yacht, of the skater's swing on the outside curve, of the flash and swerve of swallow-flight, showed in that swift wheeling transit, a joy for the eye. Upon the crown of the bridge she turned, with a wave of her hand; then was gone.

To-morrow, *to-morrow*! The sun shone blessings on her, blue hills beyond the bridge beckoned her, the glad road curved south with her. . . . To-morrow, Bluette, to-morrow! Vogue la galère!

XXVII

"To-morrow?—Why, to-morrow I may be
At one with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand year!"

SHUTTLECOCK again! Ass that I am, to have gone back to the terrace to-night. Had I taken my after-dinner coffee in the garden my furious visitant would have found me there, Pat could not have sent him on to the Café of the Comedy, I should have been absent at the moment of the telegram, and all this terrible business could scarcely have ensued.

I might have known I should find no Blulette at the Café,—I ought to have guessed she had wheeled away from Brivac for good and ever. Yet I must go, must yield to the bat, must "linger round the very spot" like some sad and sickly lover for whom no to-morrow waits radiant behind the veil of a night.

Groschaud and half a dozen other officers were gathered on the terrace when I reached it again, after dinner. They were grouped at the top of the steps, and I had to pass among them. Groschaud regarded me bearishly as up the steps I came, but the Hussar lieutenant made amends; he was more than polite, he found me room at his table in the ring, and very courteously he asked if ever in England we have evenings so beautiful as this.

"Skies sometimes as lovely," I said. Twilight was darkly violet beyond the river, its fringe was crapy over the hills that had beckoned the flying wheel; above our

heads the blue was dappled by cloudy fleeces, hued in flamingo and canary, reflecting the sunken sun. The hour was nearly eight; in the lit room behind us the notables of Brivac were assembling: I could hear the click of ivory balls and the clink of glasses sound clear amidst laughter and talk. Already the pianist was preluding, with little spurts and splashes of opalescent sound: we waited for the voice of Blulette.

And then the disclosure came. Widow Bonami ran out upon the terrace. She was tearful with vexation, a telegram shook in her hand.

Alas, alas, how to replace her!—there was only one Blulette, the Widow lamented. “No singing to-night, Messieurs,—no songs of Blulette any more!” Ah, but it was cruel, it was too hard, the bad girl, the ungrateful! “Tenez, Messieurs, she sends me this, a dispatch, from the station at Turasson,—behold it!” The Widow flapped the telegram to and fro. “Ah, but it is too cruel,—what a loss to the Café! and me a sister to her, Messieurs,—like an own sister, the ungrateful, the stony of heart!”

“But calm thyself, my plump beautiful! Sit thyself, my cabbage,—drink of my glass!” The Lieutenant of Hussars was trying to comfort her gallantly.

“Ah, but it is too much,—see now, she comes to Brivac, she demands to sing at the Café of the Comedy: it is unusual, the Café is not a beuglant,—but I yield, I agree,—I so love her at once that I agree! And now!”

The Widow Bonami was positively sobbing over her loss.

Uncomfortably I watched Groschaud. His face had clouded redly, he had thrust his cap up from his perspiring brow. He snatched the telegram, read it, crushed it with twitching fingers and hot palm.

“Where goes she, *where* goes she, then?” His utterance

was raucous, he steadied himself against his little iron table, almost as intoxication might do.

"Nay, ask me not,—ask not *me*,—how know I!" the Widow stormed. "Me, I know nothing,—needs ask some other than me!—She goes to some man, be sure . . . M'sieur the Angliche, maybe *he* knows. . . . Say, then, M'sieur!"—she turned upon me vixenish,—“where goes she, the bad Blulette?”

"My faith, Madame!"—I stammered,—“why ask me, how know I?—I——”

But Groschaud's fierce stare was on me, and I broke down in the lie: I boggled, I abruptly ceased.

"But answer, then, Englishman!" gloomed Groschaud.

It was a risky moment. The Captain-Treasurer was re-pointing the tips of his moustache sarcastically, the Captain-Instructor was muttering something about “France for the French”; strain and emergency throbbed in the air. A defter man than Alain Tanger might have smartly lied; or have risen, yawned, said “No singing here to-night, hey? Ah well, then, me, I go to the beuglant!”

But now it was too late to quibble or go. For “Answer! Answer Madame!” the Major's voice came to me again, insultingly.

Then the Hussar intervened. “What nonsense, my infants!” laughed the blue Hussar. “Why should he answer? M'sieur is gallant,—he does not kiss and tell.”

But that was oil on the fuel. “The cursed English, they take from us all!” the Major uttered, explosively; and then a word came sibilant through the window behind us, a word that was a spark. “*Siam!*” Somebody threw the word at us, and the next instant Groschaud was up and flaming, distraught.

“Nay, sit thyself again,—he will kill thee, Englishman!” the Hussar said; through the eddy and buzz of blood in

my head I heard him, and the words were oil on the fire. For I too was up and straining, France and England,—Groschaud and poor myself—were on the verge of battle-royal: and the Lady of the Tournament, where was she?

Thank heaven she was away,—somewhere beyond the darkening hills. Thank heaven for her absence! For at that tense moment the tired hoofs of a yellow pony and the worn wheels of a crazy cart came to a stop in the Square below, and Flapp,—Flapp in his rustic disguise,—*Flapp!* blundered out of the cart and up the steps, to me.

"My money! my twenty thousand francs, that I trusted. And the letter! Give them, give them, thief of an English! Ah, give! Police!"

He spoke in French, confound him! He spoke with a bull's voice, that all the Square might hear.

In a twink the Café emptied itself upon the terrace, a little crowd was gesticulating below, the officers stared, laughed, pointed the moustache of scorn.

"Morbleu! a common swindling Angliche, then!" the Major growled: I heard him, and a flood of sour humiliation came on me drowningly. The terrace whirled, the blobby, wobbly figure of Flapp swayed and swelled before my blurred eyes. "Thief, thief!" he cried, and then at the foot of the steps I saw gendarmes appear. I shivered for one icy moment: the next, I burned: fury ungovernable boiled up within me and burst its bounds.

"Damnation idiot!" I groaned. I clutched at the mulatto, I jerked him round, my fist and foot went out at him, flounderingly he shot down the steps, and squelchingly he fell upon the gravel; shouting his "*Voleur!*" and "*Assassin!*" still.

But he did not lie there long. Astounded, I saw the gendarmes haul him up and grip his arms as he stood.

"Creating a riot, my oath!" said the Commandant of Gendarmes, in his most official tone; the Commandant might have been on the watch for a disturbance, he appeared in the nick of the moment so pat and à propos.

"Off with him, then, my infants!" the Commandant mouthed, and a burst of laughter went up as the squealing Flapp was hurried away.

"You take the wrong one, I am the wrong one!" he screeched.

"Silence, pig of a dirty face!" said the Commandant, magnificent with drawn sword. "Silence, my oath! The wrong one never!"

Another round of laughter, and then portentous silence on the terrace. All eyes were set upon the Angliche. *What* was it Groschaud had said?—"A common English swindler"? I felt their stare upon me, tissuing me a garment of peril or shame: I knew that every man of them was waiting to know if in French fashion I'dare play the man. Even the waiters, with slant tray poised upon lifted flat palm, paused expectant. The Widow Bonami had fled.

Silence, expectant silence still; until aquiline noses began to draw downwards, and bushy eyebrows to push upwards, and sneers to dawn in swarthy eyes, and sensuous lips to curl towards hard-cut shaven chins. Silence, pregnant silence; and then a mutter of jeers.

"But speak, then, speak!" the Hussar was urging me in whispers. "Say something, do something, M'sieur!"

Groschaud sat with his face averted from me, but he twirled a conqueror's moustache. "Vive Groschaud!" somebody cried, and he smiled victorious.

"Where is Madame Bonami?" the Captain-Treasurer asked. "This Angliche must not here stay."

That was no moment fit for Anglo-Saxon phlegm or British common-sense. I was in France: the French code

of punctilio alone applied to the occasion; Flapp and I might fist and kick, that counted for naught: it would count for less than nothing to fist Groschaud. . . . And Blulette is French! what would *she* think me? A coward, a coward. . . . Ah no! not Blulette!

"Did M'sieur the Major use the word 'swindler'?—of me?"

I was obliged to say it; Heaven knows I don't resent the word: I seem a swindler to myself. But I had to speak; the moment was imperative.

"It is true," I told my audience, "that I have lost twenty bank-billets,—and a letter. I shall make good the money. I regret my carelessness. That is all. It is quite simple. . . . I have been thieved. . . . Does M'sieur the Major accuse me of swindling *now*?"

"Morbieu!" he growled. "You take money,—of a black man,—to buy a poor girl,—an honest girl till then. A Frenchman calls that double swindling; what calls it an Englishman, hein?"

That was a spur. "An Englishman doesn't bring a girl's name into a quarrel," I growled. "Ma'am'selle is honest, now and always. You shall apologise for that!"

"I wish I could," he gloomily said.

"Then I shall tell M'sieur he lies!"

"Good, good!" the Hussar whispered: "Good, you do it well!"

"I lie, you say, morbleu!" Slowly the Major rose, and slowly he moved towards me: his gloves were in his hand. The silence around us was palpitant. "Vive Groschaud!" some one uttered, but the rest cried hush.

The Major took his gloves by the tips, swung them lightly up, and slapped them across my cheek. The next moment he stumbled backward with a smarting eye; my left had gone out instinctively, punctilio notwithstanding; a man's not made of wood, as Patrick says.

Strong arms curled round me : strong arms were holding the Major back. "No, no,—you spoil it !" the Hussar frowned. "M'sieur must not do the English box-fight, no ! What, this is an affaire of honour, by all the rules !"

"A duel, then, I suppose ?" I spoke indifferently : suddenly I felt tired and dull.

"Mon dieu, M'sieur,—what else ? But certainly yes, a duel,—a devil of a duel, *sacredie* !"

"But see you," I objected, "I'm a stranger, I've no friends, no seconds ?"

"M'sieur has me,—Claud de Chausseaguète, lieutenant of Hussars, at M'sieur's command. And thou also, Antoine, is it not ?" He turned to his chum.

"But certainly, with all the extremest pleasure in the universe," said the subaltern of Dragoons. "Enter here a little, M'sieur," and they took me into the Café, to a corner near the silent pianoforte and the deserted stage. . . . *How* long ago was it, how long ago ?—since Blulette had told me there "To-morrow !"

"See you, in the recesses of our beings we are quite glad," Chausseaguète said. "M'sieur's act is sympathetic to our temperaments,—we love not the so-pompous Groschaud. Too much popular fuss about him, my parole ! M'sieur goes to check his assumption,—M'sieur goes to puncture his indiarubber ?"

"I suppose I've got to try," I said.

"Parbleu !" It was the Dragoon who spoke. "M'sieur the Angliche is the first offended : M'sieur will choose the pistolet, without doubt ?"

"I'm no hand at the sword."

"Pistolets, then. Good. Now we shall go to arrange it with the Major's seconds. We shall wait on M'sieur, at his hotel, in two hours."

"Awfully good of you !" said I.

I have killed the two hours by writing all this : I wonder if I shall kill Groschaud to-morrow ? The duel is arranged for ; I could not refuse it, the fellow recalled that I promised to fight him, if I stopped in Brivac and made love to Bluette . . . I remember how lightly I made that pledge, the first afternoon, in the public garden, but I cannot give myself the lie.

"What nonsense !" I said to the two. But I shall keep my word.

It is all arranged for : the Hussar and the Dragoon are full of the occasion. I sit in the chamber historic, on the eve of my first feat of arms. The Duke looks down at me encouragingly. "Aim cool, my lad" ; the Generalissimo of all the Armies of the English appears to be addressing me. "Shoot the damned Frenchman through the guzzle, for his tricks against the colours and the young Queen !"

The Duke's mute counsel doesn't hearten me much ; I can't bring myself to feel bluggy. The fault is mainly mine. *I* was bribed to bribe the man ; *I* lost his letter, *I* spoiled his chance with Bluette . . . Bluette,—Bluette and to-morrow ! . . . To-morrow may have only a morning for me.

It is for to-morrow morning. The Capitaines are to second him. We are to exchange two shots, which is duelling parlance for a shot apiece, it seems. We fire at five-and-twenty paces,—twenty-five strides apart. He's a dab with the pistol, I am not ; twenty-five strides will be quite near enough for me. Dead certain I shall be dead to-morrow,—to-morrow evening, Bluette !

THE END OF THE DIARY.

*ANOTHER PEN "TAKES UP THE
WONDROUS TALE"*

XXVIII

"A man at least gets this by his death, that his calamities are not immortal."

"JUST figure to yourself the pistols are champagne bottles and the bullets corks, M'sieur," laughed the tubby little surgeon of Hussars.

"Why yes, thou art right, my chicken,—an affaire is just nothing at all," the Dragoon assented. "Me, young as you see me, M'sieur Smit, I have had three! And not lost an inch of my lovely white skin, I assure you!"

"Me also, my faith,—eleven times,—with others, you comprehend," the surgeon said. "Oh, it is nothing,—nothing! I have watched it often."

"Yes," said Alain Tanger, slowly, "I suppose it is amusing,—to watch."

"But sometimes one takes a chill at affaires, these early mornings," the surgeon warned. "M'sieur might well have brought his overcoat—one never knows. Me, I take always all the precautions. Always I dip the bullets in solutions,—one never knows." And he enlarged on the effects of a septic bullet in human tissues, even when no vital part is touched,—blood-poisoning, gangrene, pus. . . .

"Sacredie!" shouted Lieutenant de Chausselaguêtre

at last, "Talk of other things, morticole of my soul! . . . Smoke a little, then, M'sieur." He gave his man a cigarette. "And now a small nip, mon Principal!" He unscrewed a flask.

The Englishman was looking white.

To be killed: this pleasing sentient being to resign: to stand up young, vigorous, flushed with the wine of warm blood,—and then in an instant to stagger, fall . . . stiffen into something that lies stark, deaf, blind . . . a thing that stirs not, feels not, knows not, sprawls a mere ugly mass of slimy white coldness . . . presently to warm and redden a little under the energy of burrowing mites. . . .

"My God, and for what? What a fool I have been! *Is it yet too late?*" . . .

He had met the Hussar, the Dragoon, and the surgeon at the cross-roads a mile beyond Brivac bridge; Groschaud and his friends were to reach the rendezvous by boat. It was imperative to keep the meeting and field of battle secret, lest gendarmes or Vive Groschauders should intervene. For the Major was the so-famous hero of France: his antagonist was known now as the swindler of a peasant, and an Angliche: the people of Brivac would mob the duel, if they could. So a rumour had been spread in the town,—it radiated from Chausselaguêtre at the Café very late the previous night,—that the Englishman would not fight, that he dare not face the hero of France. That bruit accounted for the look which Patrice gave his Milor' when he poured the early coffee: it was a look of mingled rejoicing and disdain.

Alain Tanger had slept quite well: he awoke almost cheery, he jested with Patrice when he rose: he had been conscious of no particular degree of fear. But this jocular fat sawbones, with his talk of septic irritation and contagious discharges,—his black leather case of knives and

pincers ready in his itching hand,—was too much for any beginner at the duello.

"I only got that brandy just in time," thought the beginner, as the flask was corked and again they went on.

An excellent wide, white, hard road lay before them, undulating gently for miles: it seemed to Alain Tanger like the easy, gay, free highway of life itself. But they were turning aside from it now, a by-path was leading them among shadowy trees and wet grasses, and it seemed to him that now he was treading the damp and dismal Valley of the Shadow itself.

Reluctantly he left that high-road. The instinct of the duello has died out of Englishmen for nearly three generations past. Death was what he anticipated now: Groschaud would be there in murderous mood, and he himself but a living target. "Well, that will end it all!" he set his teeth as he thought,—"*Lois, ill-luck, genteel poverty, the scathe I was going to do Bluette . . . Bluette!*"

The by-path was leading him into a shrubby dingle, that after a furlong of uneasy walking broadened into a clearing; a clearing grassy and flat, and shut by a ring of chestnut trees from outer view. He halted beneath the trees, and watched the scene.

Groschaud and his friends were on the spot already: he could see the Major leaning on his doctor's arm: he saw the Captain-Instructor signal, and Chausselaguêtre left the Englishman's side.

"Where's the Abbé?" thought Tanger. "He has missed it this time." A kind of choky laugh took him at that thought,—Ledru was shaken off for once!

"They seek delay," Chausselaguêtre said, in almost an injured tone, when he returned to his principal under the chestnut-boughs. "It is his beautiful eye. It was your so-national box-fight,—you knocked it blue! He

cannot see to shoot you well, they inform. They ask delay!"

"Delay? But no! Off altogether, if you like, but—it's now or never,—I have to travel, to-day,—to an appointment distant. It's now or not at all!" the Englishman said.

His second smiled. "I comprehend well. An appointment with beauty. . . . Ah well, then I did right, hein? I refused their stupid delay. If their man can't see to aim well, the better then for mine, said I."

"They didn't hint at—at an apology—at all?"

"Parbleu! They did," the Hussar said, resentfully. "The Major wishes to eat his words about Blulette. But, sacredie! I told them quick, no possible apology. What? to be accused of stealing a dirty cultivator's money! What? to get a glove across one's face before all the world! . . . My parole, no case for an apology, that! One could not think of it!"

"You are very zealous for me, M'sieur!" Alain said. "Too devilish zealous," he muttered, the Hussar being gone with a step quite blithe and important. "Why not jump at his half-apology?" the Englishman worried. "Why not accept, why not stop the whole damnable thing? . . . I ought to,—I must."

But he did not: lethargy was numbing him, his will-power seemed to be oozing away, and he was partly conscious of that. "The approach of Death," he explained to himself. "It numbs me first."

"But this place will do,—why, it will do very fine!" the Hussar was saying to the Captain-Instructor. "I shall remember this place for the next time, my old one. . . . And nobody followed you, mon Capitaine? Why, then, we shall shoot in peace and comfort, eh? Come, then, agree with me on the positions. . . . Good, good, the very

thing! And now to walk the paces. Mon Capitaine, will *you* measure the twenty-five?"

The Captain-Instructor was rather a tall man, who took long strides. "The longer the better," Alain Tanger had the mind to think, and he wished him seven-league boots. The field of honour was marked out, the Hussar span a louis in the air, "Pile or face?" he merrily cried.

"Pile!" the Captain-Treasurer guessed. But the coin had fallen face, the choice of position was the Hussar's.

Again the louis shone in the sun, and choice was now the Captain's: Groschaud would handle instruments familiar to his palm.

The Dragoon was discontent at that. "But my pistols, see you, they are lucky ones!" he grumbled. "Never have they missed their man,—one of them, anyhow." Yet the Hussar had the right to load the weapons, and he did it with artistic care.

"Tenez," he explained, "a mere thought too heavy-handed in the load, and the shot is spoiled. A miss-fire, it counts as a shot, M'sieur Smit; it is serious, a miss-fire,—it spoils an affaire. And *two* miss-fires! the idea is too horrible, my parole!"

"But there! it is accomplished, as not the first-comer could do it, my infants! They will not miss, M'sieur; you can shoot without fear. And now we shall make sure that nothing will arrest the balls," and the seconds searched the Principals. Pockets were emptied of keys, cash, cigarette-cases, watches, knives; the Seconds saw that no watch-chain hung defensively across a vital line, they thrust their fingers to the skin lest buckle or secret mail might defraud. And next they placed the Principals, each at his post about the length of a cricket-pitch away from the other. "Perfectly beautiful!" said the Hussar, as in turn he spied at each of them over the other's shoulder. Then he bustled up

to the Englishman, rolled his shirtcuffs into his sleeves, buttoned up his coat-lappel for him, so that no white rim should background the Frenchman's pistol-sight, and posed him carefully for the fray.

"Messieurs the Seconds will presently put themselves aside!" commanded Lieutenant Claud de Chausselaguêtre, Director of the Combat, and he retired a few paces himself, much as an umpire stands back from the crease. "Supply the weapons! Set the weapons full cock!" the Hussar went on, in the voice he used with his squadron. And then, in lower tones, Antoine the Dragoon gave the last counsels to his man. "At the word two, fire at his breadpan, mon cher! Give it the beggar straight!"

Then came the voice of command from the Director of the Combat. "Messieurs the Seconds and *Medécins* will stand right back. Messieurs the Principals must hold the pistolets downward, at arm's length. . . . Good! Now make attention! . . . At my enquiry 'Are you ready?' Messieurs the Principals will respond 'Yes!' in a loud voice. I shall then utter the words, 'Fire! One, Two, Three!' Messieurs the Principals have the right to shoot between my first and my last, but not before nor after. You comprehend well?"

Alain Tanger comprehended too well: the numbness had passed, he understood the moment. The cheerfulness of Chausselaguêtre rang hollow, with an under-meaning; the Director of the Combat seemed no longer absurd. The Hussar was *not* ridiculous, although he had seemed it so far; the Hussar was the mouthpiece of Fate, the giver of life or extinction. . . . Another minute, in another minute! . . . The sun poured down, a bird sang near, the turf was green and sparkling, he saw a grasshopper leap gay, life swarmed and buzzed about him. . . . In a minute, in another minute. . . .

"*Are you ready, Messieurs!*"

It was a croaking "Yes" that Alain Tanger gave. His throat was hot, his tongue was swollen, his head seemed clamped against the bursting rush of his blood. What dragged like a pause intolerable ensued. He could hear the clicking of his watch, that lay on the grass near his feet: each tick came fainter, more tardy, less inevitable than its forerunner. Time itself seemed to be slowing to a close,—nay, Time was standing still. . . . And he could not think a prayer.

A red mist pulsed and waved between him and Groschaud: Groschaud he could hardly see: Groschaud stood sidewise, effaced, as narrow a target as might be, and seemed a mile away. "You won't hit him, you *can't* hit him!" something was moaning within the Englishman: his soul was speaking to him, agonised lest its tenancy should be coming to an end.

"But I must, I *must*," he seemed to hear himself reply: he was sure that his own life depended on that. . . . Another second, in another second. . . .

The voice of Chausselaguêtre came again, but muffled, as though far away. "Make attention!" Alain Tanger's arm jerked itself up to the aim. . . . "Fire! One! Two!—" . . . He never caught the shout of "*Three!*" for whip-crack detonations drowned it. The double crack was all that Alain Tanger heard: he heard no whizzing sound, though he felt the dull thump of a blow.

"My God!" he moaned, as dream swooped down upon him: he could not better pray than that even now, in the hour and article of death. . . .

But what was this? Why, he was *alive*, he was awake from that swooping dream, he knew that he was lying on the grass, quite peacefully alive. The surgeon was fingering

his bared shoulder, but he was alive! . . . "Bluette! *Bluette!*"

The surgeon smiled at that murmured name. "M'sieur is fortunate," said he. "In love and war,—the both!"

The watch was ticking quickly now: Time had recovered its pace. Perhaps the excellent wide white high-road of life might stretch before him still. "Am I not hurt?" he trembled.

Chausselaguêtre was grinning down at him: "Parbleu!" grinned the gay Hussar.

"Why, it is just nothing!" the doctor smiled. "Nothing at all! Said I not so? M'sieur feels a pain just here, where the clavicle joins the sternum, is it not? I knew it, me! Ah well, it is only the contusion,—M'sieur is lucky,—a mere ricochet!" The bullet had swerved from the metal of a cloth-covered coat-button. Death had touched and quitted him. The doctor showed him the dented button. "What did I not say? Oh, just nothing, an affaire!"

"But, but——"

Alain Tanger lifted himself on his elbow, then sank again: he dared not look along the grass. "Groschaud?" he had closed his eyes,—"*Is he——*"

"You aimed too high, mon cher," the Hussar smiled. "You only hit his finger, parbleu! But, one comfort, he won't ever shoot again!"

Alain Tanger lifted himself anew, and this time looked along the pitch to the other wicket. "Thank God, thank God!" For Groschaud was still standing there: the doctor was bandaging his pistol-hand, but the Major was on his feet.

"Vive Groschaud!" shouted his doctor, along the pitch.

"By all means," gasped the Englishman: "Vive Groschaud!"

XXIX

"The sundry contemplation of my travels."

IT was good to get back to one's room again, good to be able to tear up one's letters of farewell. He had written them in the night; one for Jefford Goss, and one for Goss to give Blurette. But now he was exultant, he was alive, the to-morrow had come, its evening was coming, and he piped as he tore the letters across and across.

"M'sieur whistles, he is gay," said Patrice, peeping in. "And me too, I am gay with M'sieur. See, I weep, I am so gay!"

"Hooroo, Pat!" laughed the M'sieur Milor'. "Hooroo with me, avick! Dry your eyes, my friend."

"By all means, M'sieur,—uru! uru! Though I know not what it means, uru?" Pat blinked his tears away, as they took and shook glad hands.

"Hooroo! It means that I'm alive, Pat,—that I've fought and won. Hooroo, mon ami, hooroo!" And absurdly the two hoorooed together.

Ah, but it was good to be back in life again, fine to be able to jest with Pat,—with Pat, who watched him with eyes of respect renewed. For already the news was creeping abroad; before long all Brivac would know that the Angliche was no coward, had not run from the tented field, had fought after all,—had fought and worsted the so-famous soldier of France.

But best of all it was to be young and strong and in love with Blulette; with the day and the evening of the day before him; the day to travel in, the evening to tryst in and woo in and win in,—the evening at the Lodge, the night and the nest.

His scruples were all to the winds once more. "Vogue la galère, Pat," he cried, and Pat: "By all means, M'sieur Milor! Uru!"

"But behold! I forget. In my joy. This dispatch telegraphic."

The Englishman's heart fluttered at the sight of the telegram: it might be a countermand from Blulette. He hated to touch it: he held it long, indeterminate. Then he dashed it open.

"Hooroo, Pat!" he cried again, for it was merely a message from Goss: "Due Brivac 3.11," the telegram said.

"Eleven past three," Alain Tanger reflected. "Hm-m,—a nuisance! three hours later than I thought. Hm-m." Could he afford to wait for Goss, until eleven minutes past three? Was it worth while?

He pulled out his watch, his old companion that now was ticking soberly, as though no terrible seconds of life-or-death pause had ever disturbed its beat. Eleven o'clock, the calm hands placidly reported. Could he wait for Goss and still keep punctual tryst with Blulette? If not,—to the deuce with Goss and his fussing,—of course.

"Pat, ashore,—know'st thou the Château de Thanneguy?"

Certainly Pat knew it. It was just nothing: a ruin, all simply. Not worth the pains of M'sieur to voyage to see.

"Nevertheless, I go to see it, mon ami. Tell me, by what line travels one to that simple ruin?"

"Bigre!" Pat rubbed his red head. It was a question

for M'sieur the Chief of the Gare, that! But it might be the line Brivac-Piviers-Angoulême,—it *might* be.

"Good, good! And now the Indicator of the Roads of Iron, all quick!"

"Again, M'sieur?" Pat had started for the door, but he turned and showed a face of dismay. "Is it that M'sieur goes to leave us, *now*?"

"I do, bedad,—Brivac is too risky a place for me. Brief life is here my portion, mon Paddy!"

"And M'sieur returns not to the Lance, *never*?"

"Faith, I know not . . . but quick with that Indicator," and he began to pack his kit-bag, whistlingly.

"M'sieur inexorably quits us?" Pat presently said, as the parting guest was poring over the time-table.

"I do, mon ami, I do."

Pat stooped to his ear with an awe-stricken whisper, "Is it that M'sieur Milor' has killed the Major entirely?"

The Englishman shouted with laughter. "Irish you are,—Irish you must be, my friend. . . . No, Pat, no,—I've only killed his finger . . . Brivac 4.37, Piviers 5.26, Thanneguy 6.4," he went on. . . . "Yes, I can wait for him," he told himself, as he ran his fingers down the tall columns of the railway guide. . . . Why should Goss be so ready to travel so far?—the old suspicion woke suddenly.

"M'sieur, then, quits because he lost his money here?" Pat gloomily said.

"No, no, great softhead of my soul! Money, what is money? Lucre, avant! . . . But tenez, that me reminds,—behold a louis for thee,—nay, behold two louis, my Pat."

He had almost forgotten the money trouble, and even now the reminder did not damp him. "It will all come

right, come right, come right!" some prescience sang in his ear.

The gold lay on the table unhandled: Pat was staring at it ruefully. "But take it, then, man!" the Milor' said. "Why hesitate? Wishest thou more?"

"I want it not . . . I will not it have! M'sieur has lost so much . . . I did not serve M'sieur for money."

"But I am rich,—thou knowest not how rich,—in my heart, Pat avick! Tenez, accept it, from thy friend."

"M'sieur goes . . . I will *not*," gloomed Patrice.

"But harkee, Pat,—I will see thee again. Tenez, mon ami, if ever I keep house of my own thou shalt be my master-of-hôtel!"

"Saperlipopette! M'sieur says *that*? . . . ah, M'sieur! ah, M'sieur! . . . But no, M'sieur parts, he returns not!" The man had passed in an instant from shine to rain; he lifted the coins from the table-corner, but left a tear-spot there instead.

"Dry thy soft eyes, Pat,—we shall meet again, never fear it. See, now, I part at three hours, for the Gare. Command that my account is all ready."

Alain Tanger arose from the study of the Indicator of the Roads of Iron with the pride of a traveller in France who by dint of headwork has understood the puzzle and made his trains and plans dovetail. He could now lunch leisurely, smoke and dream an hour or two, meet Goss at the railway-station, learn his "great news," get him to repay the mulatto, and then catch the train conveniently and be at the Lodge of Tante Servais long before the hour of seven. It was a masterpiece of planning, he felt.

Yes, he would meet Jefford Goss at the Gare and have the talk out there. Time would be plentiful for that. Though, after all, he felt indifferent,—even if Goss was straight: strange how careless he felt as to what the "great

news" might be. It mattered little to know in which particular town of what State on the other side the Atlantic Lois Amaury might be lurking . . . Blulette, *Blulette* !

He knew now that he had staked the great issue on his life : that, sub-consciously, he had wagered with Death, "Me for thee, or Blulette for me." She would be waiting for him at the Lodge, that was the main consideration. Divorce and all the formalities would happen in due course, the two thou' should be drawn on for that : but, "Let all that wait," his heart cried out, "I will not wait till then . . . Blulette ! *Blulette* !"

Oh yes, the principal good thing about the coming of Goss was that he could be set to free the mulatto, could go as English lawyer to the Gendarmery and explain, so that the exultant lover might be free to take wing for the château undelayed.

The château ? he would reach it at 6.30,—the train was due at Thanneguy at 6.4. There was an earlier train, indeed, which would touch the station three hours sooner or more. But the 4.37 would amply serve. "In the evening," Blulette had said. "Blulette, *Blulette* !"

Alain Tanger went down to table in a tranquil and self-satisfied frame of mind. Everything was going to fall out right, he felt sure of it now : the loom of Fate was weaving silk for him at last. "Hooroo !" he whispered as Patrice served him, and "Uru ! uru !" Pat whispered in return.

Yet nothing fell out at Brivac quite as Alain Tanger expected, from his first hour there to his last. He left that dangerous little bourg three hours thirty-seven minutes and a scramble earlier than he meant to do ; he did not wait for Goss nor stop for anything, he galloped and ran from the Lance for the one-o'clock train. "Confound the so-famous soldier !" he grumbled as he fled. "*He* may stand up to pot you as much as he likes, but turn even a finger-

bone of his into a relic at your peril in this tindery, powdery, little town !” And within the railway-carriage he burned with shame at the manner of his exodus.

He had been perfectly placid, hopeful, and content in the garden of the Lance. He was lunching nobly, and all the more heartily because of the absence of the Major and Ledru. “Behold, M’sieur !” Pat had set before him a cobwebby little bottle. “It is of the best in the caves of the Lance. For M’sieur,” he said.

“But no—but no !”

“But yes, M’sieur ! Madame knows well that I uncork it, I say to her M’sieur shall drink to the Lance a good last glass.”

Tanger had drunk the good last glass to Patrice, and now he was lolling, under the luminous green arbour, with coffee and a cigar that Patrice had brought, a Londres, he said : alone there, save for the presence of Pat. Patrice hovered round him hen-like, breaking his own chatter now and again with sighs and silent gaps. It was nearly one o’clock, there were hours to wait, it was hot even under the berceau, and M’sieur Milor’ had begun to doze. But the garden-gate came bangingly open, and the Lieutenant of Hussars ran in.

He was almost breathless, but he spoke. “Quick ! You must file ! Must this moment depart ! Quick !” he panted. “Part by the train ! All at once !”

“But why on earth——”

“You must ! you must !”

The news of the Major’s wound had spread and magnified, the Hussar panted. The Vive Groschauders had gathered, they were exciting each other to arms against the Angliche, at that moment they were viveing and demonstrating outside the Major’s quarters, in the barracks, only ten minutes away !

They had crowded past a complaisant sentry and filled the inner court of the caserne, the Hussar explained. They had demanded their hero, to see him—to make sure that he was still alive : and now they were fuming and sacréeing at the sight of that brave right arm of his in a sling and the thought of his shooting no more. “Down with the Angliche, *à bas le damné Angliche!*” they were shouting, up at the barracks, only ten minutes away! Had he not tried to *kill* Groschaud? It was an English plot, the assassin was an Englishman, and had he not robbed fifty thousand francs, from a poor old bonhomme at Vignols-la-Gare? Thief! Assassin! Angliche, *à bas!* Where were the gendarmes? *À bas!*

“It is asinine, it is idiotic, it is so, mon cher! But they come, all the same, they come to take thee,—I have flown! File, then! By train! Anywhere! All at once, sacrédie!”

“I won’t,” said Alain Tanger, angrily. “It was a fair fight. Do you think I’ll run? Besides, I’ve got to stop in Brivac till three, to meet a man.”

“Parbleu, thou’lt meet thy man dead if they get thee! File, mon dieu! File, then!”

The Hussar was shouting at him, was frantically waving his hands at him, shoosing at him, like a henwife at her brood.

“See now, Groschaud sends me,—he *begs* thee to part, he holds back the foolish ones, by oratory, for a while, but he cannot long. See, now, he says it will be a quarrel international, it shall be war for France if the foolish ones seize thee,—on account of him!—Nay, he *begs* thee,—he *begs* thee to file!”

“Yes, yes, M’sieur,—the second omnibus, it parts for the Gare this minute,—file, file!”

Patrice was fidgeting round them, his red hair flaming in a ray that cut through the screen of leaves and flashed

on the tears in his staring eyes. "Fly, M'sieur! fly,—I shall——"

"Silence, species of a carrot!" the Hussar stormed. "Hark! Listen! They come, thou canst hear them, M'sieur!—File, file!"

Alain Tanger could certainly hear a noise of shouting in the distance. "My Jove!" he reflected, "if I stop and get mauled or jailed, all up with meeting Blulette!" . . .

That thought decided him; he could not afford heroics any more. "My bag, Pat,—my bill, Madame,—keep the bus!" he shouted, as he hurried into the court-yard, The omnibus stood ready, Patrice snatched the door open, Chausselaguêtre hustled the Englishman in, the bag followed him, a fivepound-note fluttered out of window for the bill, "*Hut!*" the driver cried, and away they went, swinging and crunching out upon the boulevard, in sight of the Vive Groschauders fifty yards away.

He would have been out of reach from the first had he not shouted to the driver to stop, only a dozen rods or so along the road. "Stop, coachee! Hi, Pat, hi!"

Patrice, his face almost as fiery as his hair, ran like a deer to the omnibus-step. "Why stop you!" he panted as he mounted, as a roar of discovery came from the approaching mob, "Why stop you, pig of a Jules! Death of my life, why don't you whip up?"

"Catch on, Pat,—hold on, omadhaun!" And Patrice held to the strap and step, as again the vehicle lurched and rolled.

"Give this—to the Englishman—who shall come—to the Lance," jerked Alain Tanger, amidst the rocking and the bumps. "Gone to Château de Thanneguy. There this evening," was all he had time to scribble on the back of his bill, for the Vive Groschauders were all but on them now. "Arrest him! Arrest thyself! ah, coward! ah,

pig of an Angliche!" They were almost up to the omnibus, they yelled as they ran.

No envelope, he had no time even to write Goss's name; Pat snatched the paper, dropped from the step, galloped alongside and kicked at the off-wheeler madly. "Allez, allez like the diable!" he shouted, Jules the driver slashed with the whip, and away they rolled and rattled again, at triple omnibus speed.

The whip was cruel, the flight was undignified, but the end was gained. The mob tailed off half-way up the slope to the railway-station. Alain Tanger flung a crown to the driver, took his ticket hastily, pushed past the guardian of the inner door, ran out upon the platform, and clambered into a moving train.

It was the one o'clock train for Piviers-Angoulême, the clock was on the nick of the hour, the guard had given a squawk of his horn, the engine was groaning and wheezing, clatteringly the train had begun its journey; and all that the Chief of the Fanfare and the Captain of the Fire Brigade, van of the mob who had kept up the chase, could do was gallop alongside as far as the platform permitted, spit, flourish their fists, and yell "sacré Angliche!" and "Vive Groschaud!"

XXX

"Childe Rowland to the Dark Tower came."

IN the townlet of Thanneguy the Eighteenth Century seemed still to dwell, that louring afternoon. At Thanneguy the faded letters on the stable-wall of the Biting Swan still notify that at that good inn "on loge à pied et à cheval"; though locomotives throb in the cutting to and fro the station, and casual autocars from Bordeaux teuf-teuf to the hostel door. On mill and smithy and mounting-block an escutcheon still is legible: a frise of fleurs-de-lis still edges the chancel roof of the church. The letters R. F. are writ large on the front of the Gendarmery, where a strip of painted zinc hangs out the tricolour of modern France: yet once the building was the Taxing-house, where perceptor, intendant, and tything-man sat at the receipt of custom in the name of King and seigneur and bishop, taking toll from bourgeois, cultivator, and serf. Taxation royal, rights seigneurial, dues ecclesiastical,—salt-tax, hut-tax, capitation, quit-rent, main-morte, tithes of the tenth, the twelfth, and the twentieth, custom and recolte,—the house of the Gendarmery has seen the exaction of them all.

For Thanneguy was once a microcosm of the old régime. Taille, corvée, gabelle, serfdom, chatteldom: the Seigneur's seat-of-justice, whipping-post, carcanet, block, gibbet; his monopolies of granary, mill, wine-press, salt-store, oven, slaughter-house, dove-cote, warren, wood, and chase;

brandings, breakings on the wheel, judicial torture, forbidden printing, gagged speech, compulsory orthodoxy, mortal excommunication, eternal damnation,—relics of the long and terrible list linger at Thanneguy still.

Hardly a line of wall or roof or frontage has changed, a century through. Across the same small Square, asleep within the same pleached linden alleys, went the Seigneur in silk and velvet and lace, one hand upon a ready cane, the other clipping a jewelled hilt. To and fro the same presbytery went the priest, lieutenant of the bishop, himself hardly less than the Seigneur a lord and master of the parish realm. From the dateless church, under the same Byzantine arches, the vassal bride went blushing alone, up the avenue, over the drawbridge, across the bailey, to the Seigneur's arms, while down in hut or auberge the vassal bridegroom gnawed his fingers, in tortured loathing and impotent rage.

"A worse wedding night for the poor beggar than mine!" Alain Tanger growled, as he mused under the green arcades that flank the little Square and murmur of the past at Thanneguy.

Yes, a worse wedding-night than his own; for Lois Amaury would have kept faith with him in one particular, he was sure,—she was a being so proud and cold. . . . Not that it mattered greatly now; the snapping of the wedding-ring was almost in view; her two thousand pounds should sweat for the costs of that . . . Goss would know how to manage it . . . Goss would have got the scribbled message from Pat. Goss would travel on by the 4.37, he would be at the château by seven at the latest; there were quarters at the Biting Swan.

Meanwhile, there were hours to kill, till evening came and Blulette. It was good that she had given him tryst at Thanneguy, a place so quaint and hidden, shy Love's own

hermitage. Under the clipped limes and the sleepy chant of bees, he talked with the gammer who kept the little Café of the Square. They talked of the château, of the glorious pile that dominates Thanneguy still. He had seen it miles away, from the train. Ah, the château! It was wrecked by mobs from Angoulême, in the terrible nights of 1792, the goodwife told him; they stormed its doors and killed the Seigneur, and gutted his palace with fire.

"Malheureusement it is now but a husk" the woman said. Ah, all was over with the noble family, there was no longer a Duc,—only a Duchesse: the line was almost dead. "Ah, but a grand old family, M'sieur—what damage that it should pass!"

Oh, the lodge,—and Madame Servais? Yes, the Café keeper knew her well. "*Tante* Servais, M'sieur would mean? A good woman, though perhaps too cold and proud." Like her niece, the questioner reflected. "Oh, a good old dame enough, but proud." No doubt M'sieur would wish to visit the château? *Tante* Servais would show it him: oh yes. At any hour.

"It is to see the château that M'sieur comes to Thanneguy, of course?"

He told her "Yes,—why else?" so that there might be no wagging of tongues. And therefore, as a mere sight-seeing English traveller, he lived an hour of the Eighteenth Century at the end of the Nineteenth, in street and alley, church and hotel-dieu. Then he strolled along towards the lodge and the château: it was the Sixteenth Century, —the Eleventh, even,—that awaited him there.

He left the hotel-dieu, where still the Sisters ministered and prayed, and he came through a lane shut in by creepered walls into a straggly, tree-ringed spread of dusty turf, on the hither side of a parched-up little river. This was once the tilt-yard, he could tell: it was named the

Place of Spurs even to that day. Beyond the moating stream and right in view, unobscured by foliage, big, splendid, imposing, he saw the Château rise. A white-washed mill, the seigneurial mill of a hundred and thirty years back, straddles the river there : beyond and above it a hillock of red sandstone upholds a hanging-garden : and from the hanging-garden is thrust up the mass of the Château.

"My Jove!" He stood at gaze. The vast edifice smites the eye with admiration and astonishment. Feudalism and the Renaissance are mingled in that extravagantly huge and gorgeous pile. Stately gabled slopes and peaks and spires of roof flash white and purple, in sun or shadow, above a niched and sculptured façade. Curves, ample and almost oval, of rounded towers and a tall apsidal chapel, flank the front. Highest and most huge of all, the great square Tower lifts rearward. May and October,—the delicate jewelled grace of French Renaissance architecture wed to the green old age of stern feudality,—that is the Château de Thanneguy, fortress and palace too.

The sun loured down with humid brilliance as he stared. He stared at the Château with dislike in his eyes. Almost sardonical seemed the aspect of the great weird edifice, winking from all its panes at this wandering Englishman, so unimportant, so new. He felt himself a pigmy. "Thank the powers!" he muttered, "it is the lodge I'm bound for, not this grandiose affair!"

Superb and almost regal the fortress-palace stood, lifted too far above the common level to suit the mood of one who had come to woo a singing-girl at Thanneguy. "Something sinister and grim about its look almost. I'm glad they ruined it!" he said, savagely,—he seemed to understand the Revolution now. Arrogance, hateful pride of power, ruthless puissance, the garnered wealth and haughty breeding of generations of noblesse,—the Château told of

humiliating privileges and prescriptions, he felt inferiority and revolt as he stood before that insolent pile.

A rough stone cross leaned up in a corner of the Place of Spurs. "Ô crux, ave!" was cut on its wrinkled shaft. He thought of what the Church had been to the commonalty in the seigneurial days,—the cross did not save the peasants from carcanet and block. "Church and Château," he growled to himself. . . . "The poor devils of serfs had a bad time of it years ago!" Yes, he could understand the Revolution now. . . .

He crossed the bridge, between pairs of broken statues mythological and naked, and he stood at the foot of the avenued uphill sweep. The trees hid the Château from him there, and the prospect was cool and greensome. His spirits rose, he wandered into the copse that stretched endlessly leftward.

"We went into the woods, my Love and I!"

he found himself humming, and at that came the sudden thought that he must be instant at the lodge,—he could not be there too early,—Bluette might be there even now! Arrived before him, waiting for him! Why, he was wasting golden time!

The avenue mounted, mounted; it twisted, serpentine; it opened to broad day upon a mead of unkempt grass, and left him at the edge of a weedy fosse, in front of a pilastered porch in a lichened feudal wall. The drawbridge was gone, and a poor little pont of beams and battens carried him over the dry moat, to a door of rough oak in the pilastered cove. He jangled at a rusty bell, and the door came open slowly.

"Grand Dieu!" said Tante Servais, and made the sign of the cross.

Tante Servais was a woman of sixty, who wore the

peasant's garb with Quakerish dignity and neatness. She gave him a pinched and shrinking salutation. "It is the English M'sieur?" she said: repugnance chilled her tone.

He felt the chill. "I come at the wish of Ma'am'selle Bluette—you comprehend that, Madame, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes!" she snapped. "I comprehend it too well. . . . But I shall not conceal that I regret M'sieur has come."

He flushed. "But, my good woman,—I don't understand?"

"M'sieur understands it too well. M'sieur knows his evil purpose."

"Mon dieu, Madame!" he stammered. "I—I——" but the stern eyes of this perfectly-mannered peasant disconcerted him; he seemed to trace a likeness in them, they might have been the eyes of Bluette in her frowning mood. His own dropped before them.

"I will speak no further with you, Madame," he said. "Permit me to pass,—I will speak with Ma'am'selle Bluette."

"M'sieur cannot; she is not here."

"I am early, I know. At what hour arrives Ma'am'selle?"

"At six hours. The train from Royan," she told him grudgingly.

"Good. I shall wait; I will wait for her here."

"I may not prevent M'sieur," she said, in a level, hopeless tone. "M'sieur will await, if he so pleases. . . . But if M'sieur——" her voice rose emotionally, her speech was now a plea, . . . "M'sieur will not . . . M'sieur will respect a fallen family. . . . Oh, if M'sieur would but go!"

"My faith, Madame, why should I? I come, I await,—it is M'am'selle's command. It is my promise."

"Enter, M'sieur," said the hopeless voice. The woman held back the heavy door. "All is prepared. . . . Enter, M'sieur."

"My parole, Madame!" . . . He hesitated on the threshold. "It is a poor welcome you give."

The white old cheek burned at that. "What welcome does M'sieur expect? Is it an honour to hold the candle? I would beg M'sieur to know that for two hundred years the Servais have been honest!"

"Madame, I doubt it not. . . . But I do not comprehend either."

"M'sieur comprehends quite well, M'sieur knows this is not honest work,—M'sieur knows why he comes here!"

"My faith, Madame, I come because—because I am to marry Ma'am'selle."

"M'sieur jests; M'sieur plays with words."

"By the Lord, Madame, I do not . . . I love Blulette. For the good motive . . . I go to marry her."

"It is not possible. M'sieur cannot. It is his excuse. . . . Yet I obey. . . . For two hundred years the Servais, they obey. . . . Enter, M'sieur." She shrank aside from him as he passed.

He entered awkwardly and angrily. The woman had held off even the touch of her gown, as if he were a thing contaminating. Confound her, what did she mean? The irritating inward monitor told her meaning. Blulette must have said that he was married. . . .

Anger and disappointment came upon him weakeningly all at once: he dropped on a bench within the arch. The air was surely wet and dense with coming storm, so steamily it breathed. The strain of the day was telling on him. "I,—I do not comprehend," he said. "She told me . . . I feel the heat. . . . If Madame would have the goodness . . . a little water?"

"M'sieur shall have water," she said in her set, flat tone, and her wooden shoes clacked along the mossed flagstones of the court.

The lodge-keeper's court at Thanneguy touches a kitchen-garden, and the garden a stretch of sunburnt turf. Forty yards off he saw the great Tour Carrée rise, square and grim, its frontal half-masked by smaller towers that are round and cowed, so that feudal battlement and arrow-slit frown above Transition corbels and machicolation. But passion-flower and wisteria festooned the lower ledges and rims, espalier vines and scarlet-runners hedged the path from the lodge to the portal between the round towers: "I may take a grape, perhaps?" he asked, as Tante Servais stood near him again, with a glass and a letter in her hands.

"M'sieur will find fruit and wine set in the Château," the woman said. "Behold a letter. For the English M'sieur."

His face brightened as he read. More than the water the letter revived him. "Ma'am'selle has been here, already, then?" he smiled.

"Last night," she answered: and again he read the letter through.

"I know not if you shall come, or disappoint me. But if you come, mon Alain,—you come to happiness for us both, I hope. I shall be with you at six hours; attend for me, attend,—do not depart if I am away. Much is to plan and prepare, so that all shall end well. Alain, I love you, I think I must always have loved you, always I shall love you: attend for me if you love me the smallest in return. Do not depart,—for nothing,—nothing,—must you let yourself depart! For I am your own."

"For nothing, *nothing*, let yourself depart," he repeated, his eyes on the stern old face. "I cannot go," he said. "She commands me to wait, Madame. You hear."

"As M'sieur pleases," she sighed. "M'sieur will, then, follow me: to the Château."

"To the Château? I come not to the Château. It is to the lodge I come."

He pointed to the long cottage against the inner side of the bailey-wall. "It is in the lodge that I ask permission to attend."

"Ah no,—not *that*!" she cried, emotional again. "M'sieur enters not the house of the Servais!"

"Why not, parbleu?" he fumed. "Is it that I defile? Good, then,—I enter not. . . . It matters nothing,—I am not too proud to enter the Château, I. . . . Since Madame so decrees. . . . I shall follow Madame." He gave her an ironic flourish of his hat. Confound the woman! As though—

Tante Servais turned, and led along a drive that no carriage-wheels had crunched for more than a century of years; it was now a mosaic stretch of pebble and moss, streaked with slime of snails. The folds of the woman's gown hung stiffly, her square white tippet sat prim on her narrow shoulders, her starched white coif shone in the sun above her grizzled hair, she carried her sheaf of keys like a weapon at rest. Those keys clinked ominously, and suddenly he felt that all this he had seen before,—that he was walking to the Château a second time, behind his jailer's wife of long ago! . . . Why, there must be a cell familiar to him, somewhere yonder! He was merely going to it again. Oh yes, he had known all this before. . . .

The woman stooped to the lock of the iron-bound door, in the wall of the Tour Carrée between the smaller towers. The key grinched in the wards, the bolts groaned back, he crossed a worn threshold, and stared about him. He had come into a place of gloom; he stood at the foot of a wide, winding vaulted stairway, where from the spring of every arch a goblin or a biting swan grinned stonily down.

"Mon dieu!" he muttered. . . . "All this before!"

XXXI

"Full of the perfume of the past, and running over with fanciful days."

"**M**'SIEUR should remove himself a little," the woman irritably said.

"Why then?" said he.

"M'sieur stands just where M'sieur the Duc bled to his death."

"Mon dieu!" He went hastily a couple of steps up the stair. "Bled to death, did he, poor gentleman! How was that, Madame?"

"Red-capped ones, from Angoulême: godless villains. With scythes," she gloomed.

"Poor old Seigneur! on his own proud doorstep too! . . . Yet I warrant he'd been pretty bad on his peasants, Madame."

She frowned. "Not to a Servais should M'sieur so speak."

"But,—but why not, Madame?"

"The Servais are loyal. For two hundred years the Servais have kept the lodge. A Servais died here,—with his master," she said with pride.

"A massacre then, parbleu?"

"Six men died in this doorway," she told him. "Monsieur le Duc and Edmond Servais, they slew four of the red-capped ones. It was good. . . . Ah, M'sieur has come to a place of ill memories . . . M'sieur would be wise to go!"

"My faith, Madame,—I have ill memories of my own. My hope is to find forgetfulness here."

"A fallen family!" she muttered. "And now it goes to end in shame. . . . Oh, she must marry, *marry!* . . . And she could not. . . . M'sieur,—*M'sieur!*—with my heart I beg it of you,—do not stay!"

"But see you, Madame—I *must*,—I have promised. I must keep my word."

"It is all lost, then!" she mourned. "M'sieur will dishonour us all." She caught her apron to her eyes. "Oh, but it must not be!" she wept. "Dishonour,—shame!"

"By the Lord, Madame, I do not comprehend you!" he fumed. "How go I to dishonour you all?"

"Fallen,—fallen!" was all her answer. He shrugged his shoulders and moved away.

He mounted a dozen shallow steps and rounded a curve in the spiral. The stairway at Thanneguy mounts, reposes itself on a landing,—mounts, reposes, mounts again, and thus by stair and landing, landing and stair, it lifts itself to the topmost floor of the Château and almost to the roof. It is a hollow cylinder of stone, artfully built around a sculptured pillar: in its day the boast of the Renaissance architecture of France.

Through windows that pierce the outer curves the humid sunlight fell across a door in a niched portal that rises at the base of the triangular landing, eight steps from the bottom, in the inner wall. A wealth of chiselling adorns that doorway: pilastered, fluted, filleted, it is wreathed and enwrapt and festooned with embroidery and goldsmithery in stone. It rises to a cornice cut like a bracelet, and over it hangs the proud escutcheon of the ducal House.

Tints of emblazonry still remain: the field is argent,

barred by a bend sable charged with three bezants or : on a chief azure three crosses sanguine : the crest is a swan that bites at its own wing : the floriated legend is *Foy au Roy*. But smoke had blackened those proud words,—the smoke of Revolutionary flambeaux : half-obliterated they were ; “ Ah, the poor *Foy au Roy* ! ” he mused.

As he stood within the carven niche, dream gave him eyes, he could reconstitute the scene which closed the annals of the line. He saw the sulphur-tinted blast burst through the Tower-door, the fumes waft up the stairway : he saw red-capped assailers groping in : he saw the Seigneur, clad in silk and ruffles, skip daintily down to them, his thin sword out, his pistols speaking. He saw the bygone Servais spring to buckler his lord with his own chattel body ; the flash of powder, the reddening hew and thrust of scythes, the swaying fall of carcasses, the glow of torches on the licking spread of blood, he saw it all. He dreamed so vividly the horrors of the greater Jacquerie, that “ Surely,” he thought, “ I have seen all that in the flesh ? My God ! the wolfish snarling spring of infuriate Frenchmen ! Oh, devilish,—a devil’s spring ! ”

The solemn eyes of Tante Servais were fixed upon his own. She was silent. He shuddered. “ Madame, *Madame* ! ” he whispered down to her. . . . “ At nights,—do you never see—redness of blood through the windows ? Don’t you sometimes—hear sounds—of the terrible past ? Things awful ? Does nothing freeze you suddenly, when you’re here alone ? . . . No hiss, no cold hand . . . no—— ”

“ Hush, *hush* ! ” she gasped, before he could end. Even in the gloom he saw her features set and whiten. She was shaking, twitching, her hands were protesting,

"Grand Dieu! talk not of it, *talk not of it!*" she cried up to him. . . . "You do not know,—you arouse. . . . Oh, pass,—pass inside! Quick!"

The terror evoked in her came catchingly upon him too; a gasp took his throat, a shiver froze his spine. "In there, in there!" the woman panted, scurrying up at him, clawing at him, pressing him through the doorway into the vast grey *salle* beyond. "Grand Dieu, Grand Dieu!" She dashed the door behind them to its place. "M'sieur is *mad*,—to talk like that just here! . . . Grand Dieu, this place. . . . It is all one tomb!"

What was it he had read, in some Frenchwoman's book, about that freezing shiver of the spine? "*Fear is the precursor of the Supernatural*"?—yes, that was it, that was it. . . . But the shiver was passing, he shook away the cold precursor, he tried to smile. "Parbleu!" he said, "I now perceive why you set me to wait in the Château. You wish the Englishman to know fear."

"Ah, if M'sieur would but go,—while there is time," she said with chattering teeth: her whole frail frame was agued with dread.

"No, no!" he told her. "I shall wait."

"It is fate, maybe," she muttered. . . . "Always an evil fate for. . . . But quick, then,—pass through the *Salle de Gardes* . . . since M'sieur will."

The great guard-room, where halberd-men and musketeers once roistered noisily around the high-vaulted roaring chimney-place, emptily echoed now as they trod its broken floor. Yet it was not wholly empty. Great strawy crates lay under the windows, twisted spindles and griffin legs of antique chairs and tables shone brown amidst the straw. He paused beside them. "Why not to M'sieur le Duc?"

He pointed to the tradesmen's labels. "*À Mme. la*

Duchesse de Thanneguy, Château de Thanneguy, Dordogne," the labels read. "Why not to M'sieur le Duc?"

"There is no Duc," she answered sadly.

"The Duchesse has no son?"

"Ah no, M'sieur." She said it offensively.

"Resides she here ever, Madame?"

"But seldom,—it is not habitable. Except three rooms."

"Then why this furniture here?"

"Madame la Duchesse goes to restore the Château, some day. See, books, too,—boxes of books, a library."

"For Madame to read?"

"For Madame la Duchesse. Three rooms are for her fitted. M'sieur goes to see them. It is there that M'sieur will await. By here. Since M'sieur *will*." And then by corridor and downward flight of steps, and corridor and salle again, they came to the rooms on the garden-level, in the west angle of the façade.

"But why should Madame la Duchesse not reside? It is charming, charming!" he said. They stood in a tapestried and wainscotted chamber,—a room of roses.

Roses and rose-tendrils beset the casements, that opened on the hanging garden and framed deep landscape glimpses of forest and champaign; roses burned on the white damask of the table, amidst bread and fruit and wine; rosy twin cupids in the corners of the coved ceiling played with garlands of moulded and painted roses; roses were figured on the upper panes, and carved on the wainscot, and woven in the tissues of the hangings and the settees. "But it is charming, charming!" he said.

"It is not what it was, but it is seemly. . . . Perhaps it will be comfortable enough for M'sieur?"

His cheek burned at that.

"But, Madame,—I had not the thought to await here,

I—— Without doubt this is the apartment of the Duchesse?"

"Of course it is, without doubt,—what else?" she peevishly said. "And here,"—angrily she flung open an inner door,—“behold also the boudoir. Does it please M'sieur?"

The boudoir-room was pannelled with white carvings of trophies of the arts, set in flamboyant framing curves. Spinnet and violin, book-rack and work-basket, water-colour and statuette, easel and tambour-frame and screen and bureau all in the antique mode, garnished the boudoir. Roses perfumed it,—dwarf roses growing there, cut roses in silver bowls, rose-petals dead and buried in porcelain urns.

"Charming again, Madame,—charming indeed. And still another room?" His eyes were on a shut inmost door.

"Ah no, it is too much!" she snapped. "That, it is the bedchamber of Madame,—not for M'sieur to enter. M'sieur must respect that room!"

"Of course I will!" he growled. "What then, confound you! What do you think me? Of course I shall!"

She softened a little. "Pardon,—but M'sieur will not need it,—M'sieur will not remain,—he *must* not!" she pleaded.

"I have taken a bed at the inn," he told her sulkily.

"Then M'sieur will not need,—he will respect—he——"

"Mon dieu, Madame—I am not a boor."

"Good, good," she sighed. "But if,—if M'sieur would altogether remove himself from the . . . from the . . . the tempting! Now,—quick, before six hours——"

"But no, no, *no*! . . . I am a man reasonable," he said, "I shall respect the room of the Duchesse, of course, but,—I *will* attend your niece. It is useless to plead, I am fixed on that. Yet let me wait at the lodge,—I should prefer the lodge—I——"

"Never at the lodge," she interrupted. "Ah no . . . I shall leave M'sieur here, since he is fixed on it, alas ! . . . M'sieur will find to eat and drink," she went on, in her level, dead voice. "Wishes M'sieur a cutlet, a salad,—an omelette ? I shall obey my commands."

"But, Madame," he tried again, "let me eat with Blulette and yourself."

"Never !" she snapped. "Honest for two hundred years, the house of the Servais."

The door that opened from the boudoir into the corridor fell-to with a bang ; she was gone.

"Quakerish old dame !" he fumed. "Jealous for her niece,—thinks I mean her ruin, old Puritan ! . . . Why, then, does she let the girl on the stage ? if she is so . . ." He paced the boudoir-room.

Conscience was troubling him, he was almost physically ill at ease. And he was alone,—alone in that vast, owly, wandering, whispering-gallery of a ruin,—locked in, no doubt ; he had heard the grind and clang of the Tower-door. But the windows were open, the garden, and the terrace were at hand.

The windows were open, and yet a terror of lonesomeness came upon him, even in the humid glow of late afternoon, amidst the gaiety of roses and the sumptuousness of the boudoir. . . . What had the woman shrieked, in the stairway,—“This place, it is all one tomb” ?

A maze of haunted chambers lay somewhere behind the panneling and tapestry, somewhere beyond the corridor,—scores of salles and chambers desolate, empty of living presences but peopled with the wraiths that great old mansions hoard,—infested with memories that sneer and gibber and mow. By daylight even !

He shivered : the historic imagination stirred within him again. "I am good at that," he muttered.

He had read of this owl's palace of Thanneguy at the inn. This mansion had known the most splendid and most terrible years of the long chronicle of France. Capets, Plantagenets, and Valois had battled for the tall square keep; Du Guesclin had jousted in the Place of Spurs; the Black Prince had ravaged the demesne, Henri Quatre had seized the place, on the morrow of the battle at Coutras; Richelieu's musketeers had held it hostage; The League, the Fronde, had conspired in it; the black brows of Guise had frowned on its châtelain; along the vaulted gallery of the sculptured inner court a Chevalier de Thanneguy had passed, cat-footed, through silver moon-bar and sable shadow, to the Du Barry's door ajar. Cardinal and inquisitor, feudal chief and mediæval king, crusader and knight-errant, jongleur and troubadour, Abbé Dubois and Abbess de Jouarre, court-fool and courtesan, Mirabeau, Girondist, Rousseau, Marat, oriflamme and tricolour, ducal crest and cap of liberty, the mule-drawn royal chariot and the tumbril,—this terrible pile had seen and outlasted them all. And something of them all was haunting the splendid desolate chambers yet; the airs that sobbed along the corridors must be moans, the wind amidst the tall roofs and pilastered chimneys could not but speak in shrieks. . . .

Myriads of peasant lives had been outworn that these proud walls should rise and last; blood and hair of heretics had stiffened the mortar of the chapel, that beneath its lanceolates of ruby, sapphire, and amber a Mazarin might utter prayers. And now in the rooms where a Dame de Thanneguy had taken to her arms that fine flower of gallantry, Lauzun, he,—Alain Tanger, Englishman, commoner, courier, gamester, a nigger's agent,—was throbbing for the coming of a café-concert girl!

"Bluette, *Bluette*! . . . Confound that starchy old Tante!" he broke in upon his own musings. "When

one's niece is a chanteuse, why" . . . And she with her prayers to him to hasten away, her fears, her talk of dishonour for her humble roof, and what not! . . . Nay, why should a man whose blood is warm within sit like his grandsire carved in alabaster? . . . And yet, surely it was love, not passion, he had been feeling. . . . It was the meeting he was longing for,—not what might be the crown of meeting. . . . He loved her, he must keep his thoughts of her pure. . . .

And yet, "*Attend, attend for me*" she had written, "*I shall return. . . . I love you, I think I must always have loved you. . . . Do not depart, for nothing,—nothing! must you let yourself depart.*" Passion spoke in that, it was no chill platonism she felt when she wrote like that, with strong and dashing pen. . . .

Bluette, *Bluette*,—eyes, lips, her arms, all her dear beauty coming to him, for him! . . . Nay, he would take the goods the gods provided, and conscience and Tante Servais might go to the deuce! *Vogue la galère!* . . .

He whipped out his watch. "Curse the slow hands! Nearly an hour to wait!" Fifty long minutes to kill somehow. But how? He looked around for a book. Ah, here was the very thing,—pens, paper, a bureau.

He began to write; for nearly an hour he wrote at his diary, at chapters which will never see the light. Shadows crept into the boudoir, day failed, skies clouded, he wrote and wrote.

"I have come to her, I await her, I shall—" his pen stopped suddenly; he was listening. Yes, it was the angelus,—the intoning bell was sounding from the church, across the Place of Spurs.

"Six o'clock, then!" He snatched his papers together. "She will be coming, she will be here almost,—from the terrace I may see her . . . Bluette, *Bluette!*"

He hurried out, he passed through a window from the room of roses, and he ran to the balustrade that edges the hillock of red rock. She would be crossing the bridge, he would be able to wave to her, clamber down to her, meet her at the foot of the avenue, clasp her, and bring her blushing in !

Eagerly he leaned from the balustrade, expectantly his eyes searched the road. The statued bridge, the Place of Spurs, and the creepered lane lay in view, but nothing moved upon them, no Blurette ! The chill of doubt came on him ; the sky was gloomy with clouds of dun and purple,—it must be later than six, he thought. “ And she is not here ! ”

Clouds, impending tempest, the bare road, no glimpse of Blurette. . . . The bell still sounded, but it rang with a difference now. It was sweet and hopeful a minute earlier ; now it was a toll, a knell.

Blurette, Blurette ! If after all,—*if after all she should not come !*

XXXII

“The land of Mañana, where the wind is east.”

“**P**ERHAPS I could spy her from up there !” His eyes were cast up at the château’s eaves. . . . “She must be coming, she *must*,—her letter positively begs me wait !”

The toll of the angelus had ceased, and in the prayer-like hush that ensued the thin scream of a whistle reached the ear. Ah, that would be her train, coming late from Royan and leaving Thanneguy,—she would be hurrying from the station now, even at that moment her feet might be blessing the road,—the long road to Thanneguy which the roofs of the little town hid from view.

“Up higher, then !” Up to the gallery that tops the façade and runs below the penthouse of the eaves.

He hurried across the garden, strode the window-sill, crossed the room of roses, ran into the corridor, stumbled up the steps, scurried and searched through hall after hall, found the great stairway, climbed to its topmost landing, passed through garret after garret, lost himself in the maze of them, broke recklessly through a rickety door, and at last came breathlessly out under the steep slants of roof.

Again his eye searched road and alley and landscape, and again the eagerness of his gaze was dulled. The mile of road from train to town lay exposed to view ; figures

were stirring on it, figures belittled by the distance, he could not be sure of them, but none of them seemed to flit along with the blithe step of Blulette . . . Blulette *Blulette* ! If she should have missed the train ! . . . if, after all, *she should not come* !

Depression gripped him ; the weather gloomed, and storm was brewing westward: Thunder smithed in his forge, his bolts preparing ; evening was dying, lurid and sad. The sun blared out now and then for a fierce minute, with burnished gleams that turned the tops of the avenue-trees to copper,—they shone like torches for the while. But quickly those flambeaux faded out : at one stride twilight came, without a star. A fitful line of orange along the edge of the sky, and then dusk, dun dusk, penumbra of desolate night. Yet it was early evening still ! . . .

That glow on the leafy roof of the avenue,—the fires of the gutting château must have shone on the trees like that ! And earlier, in older times, when the hunt returned at set of day, the torches of the servitors would so copper the foliage and brown the air with fumes. . . . Bay of hound, whinny of palfrey, fanfaronnade of horns,—“*J’aime le son du cor, le soir, au fond du bois,*” how they would echo from the bridge as Dame and Seigneur, green velvet from cap to heel, rode chattering up the lit road. . . . Horns ? “*What shall he have that killed the deer ? his leathern skin and his horns to wear,*” his memory quoted, against his will, unconsciously,—malignantly, it seemed.

He winced at that, but he went on to plague himself with kindred thoughts. . . . Early in the year, the cuckoo in the trees a-calling, calling ! *Cuckoo, cuckoo ! Oh, note of fear, unpleasing in a married ear ! . . .*

Ah ! Lois, Louise, daughter of a Mr. Luke Tanger of the United States of America, was she playing his honour false, over there ? . . . And Blulette herself,—she also a

jade, maybe,—away at Royan, dining at that very moment with some merrier, defter gallant than he,—jesting at Alain Tanger's second jilting,—*she*, too! . . .

Why not? What security of her had he? A concert-girl! . . .

"No, no!" he cried, in answer to the torture of his thoughts. . . . "*Not Blurette!*"

And then, with a leap of his heart, as though it would spring down to her, he leaned from the perilous rail of the creaky gallery and called her name.

"*Blurette! Blurette!*"

For a voice was singing below, singing along the dark avenue, singing up to him, surely? He knew the voice and the song,—

"Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot!"

She was coming, she had come, she was at hand,—nay, she would reach the room of roses before him!

He dashed from the gallery into the garret and blundered through the darkened rooms. Agitation misled his hasty feet. Astray through chamber after chamber, along corridor after corridor, on the topmost floor he wandered baffled, seeking the stair. . . . She was coming, she had come, he heard the Tower-door grind ajar somewhere below him,—somewhere, confound it! somewhere, somewhere below! somewhere in the damnable maze of rooms and passages that bewildered and checked and delayed him.

"Curse the labyrinth of a place! . . . I am coming, coming, *Blurette*. Wait! *Wait!*" he shouted; and he raged and searched until at last he found a path of descent.

"*Blurette, Blurette!*"

Windingly he came down, it was the great stairway he

had hit upon, his heels squelched upon flittermice lying dead upon the steps, he heard the dry scurry of frightened lizards as he passed. Stair and landing, landing and stair, and then his heart stood still an instant! But no, it was not Blulette!

It was not Blulette who leaned within the niched portal, under the armorials and the *Foy au Roy*. No, it was Tante Servais.

She stood there like a barrier, greyly her coif and tippet glimmered in the gloom of the stairway, grey was her face with the sickliness of shame and dread.

"No, M'sieur must not,—M'sieur *shall* not!"

With arms outspread and hands that clenched their nails upon the door-jambs her body barred his way. "It is not too late," she panted. "Save her, save her from herself, M'sieur! . . . Keep her honest, M'sieur! Grand Dieu!"

"Let me pass, let me pass!" he stormed; he pulled at the clenched hands.

"No, no!" she sobbed, "you must not, *must* not! Save us from the shame of it, M'sieur! . . . She must marry, it would stain us, M'sieur *cannot* be so base! . . . It is madness of her,—M'sieur will tell her it is madness,—oh, be generous, M'sieur!" She wailed her appeal: he listened.

"See now, she is all that is left, you must not complete the ruin. . . . Behold, I have the right to beg,—consider it, a Servais!—two hundred years! . . . No, *no*!"

Her voice rose shrill, her shaking hands quivered out, gripped his arms, pressed him back, shook him,—and shook his resolution.

He did not strive with her. "Why, what simpleness, Madame!" he said. "See now, I respect you, I respect your family,—I shall respect Blulette. . . . But I must speak with her,—I go to speak with her now. Madame must let me pass that door. . . . It shall not be for long."

"M'sieur promises! M'sieur *promises*! He will not stay long?"

"I promise!" he said. "Fear nothing, Madame." He led her down the stair, he dragged back the Tower door, he bowed as she turned appealingly on the threshold. "Rest tranquil, Madame!" Then in the darkness he slowly remounted the stair.

"Deuce take the woman! she has beaten me in the end! I *had* to promise her!"

She had risen before him like embodied Conscience. . . . He had promised: yes, he had promised,—but *what* had he promised, then? . . . Confound the woman! It was she had been thinking insult of Blulette! How dare she be so sure that . . . and yet, on what else had he been counting all the day? A flush burned his cheek: on *what* had he been counting, then?

"On marriage, of course," he told himself, under the *Foy au Roy*. Was it so? He searched his mind.

Until that moment passion and exultation of spirit had blurred the truth. . . . Rights of Lois? A fico for the rights of Lois, let her go hang! But the *rights of Blulette*?

"But—she's here for me," he argued. . . .

And yet he had promised, he had pledged himself to the old woman. . . .

Revulsion came again. "Then a fico for Tante Servais! Carpe diem,—sing hey and let the world go by,—it was a lover and his lass,—gather the roses while ye may,—and so on, and so forth, patati et patata, and all that!"

Yet he had given his word. . . .

Well, Blulette herself should decide, Blulette should settle the debate. It was his to woo but hers to refuse. . . .

He would see her, tell her of the promise, hear her mind,—that would be fair,—quite fair. . . . She was waiting for him, expecting him: yonder, behind thick

hushing walls she glowed for him, hung like a rich peach ripe, that at a touch might fall to his hand,—that at his lip would melt in unimaginable sweetness. . . .

A surge of longing swept him from his feet; he leapt from thought into act. "Quick, quick!" Through the dark guard-room he passes, dead Thanneguys gibbering at him as he goes. Quick, quick! by corridor obscure and stumbling downward stairs, the road that Lauzun went. Quick, quick! Within the room of roses he stands breathless, all heart, all pulsing heart. . . . "Bluette! *Bluette!*"

The room of roses is void and silent: it is dark, the candles are unlit: but he can see that the boudoir-door is shut.

"Bluette, *Bluette!*" he falters.

There is no response.

He draws himself up, stands off from that barring door, and tries to think. Ah! the old Puritan might have spared herself the pains,—the bird is not so lightly caught as all that. Or why should she not answer his call?

Peevishly he clutches the knob and dashes the inner door ajar: silent, dusky, void the boudoir too.

His eyes are hot as they blink at the inmost door of all: he moves towards it, his fingers go out . . .

Yet no, he gave his word,—that is the bedchamber of the Duchesse: he is intruder enough already. . . . Besides, Bluette would never enter there.

Where is she, then,—where is she? . . . Somewhere aloft, maybe, searching for him in the labyrinth above, sick with the fear that he has quitted Thanneguy, as he himself with this new delay and hope deferred?

"Why couldn't she wait?" he mutters. He slams the boudoir door behind him, crosses the room of roses, and stands in the corridor, listening there. He

hears but one sound : loudly, almost jarringly, a clock is ticking the precious moments away. . . . Again he hearkens ; only the ticking of the clock,—yes, and the thumping of his heart.

Then for one startled instant pulse and breath within him pause. For a voice is singing within the boudoir-room : it is a trembling voice, a voice that—that seems to blush. . . .

“Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot !”

He turns, he hurries forward, he reaches the boudoir-door ; the door glides open, with a nestling sigh she is in his arms.

The perfumed dusk has deepened in the room of roses. Her face is a rose, if he could see it, but there is little light. Her filmy dress is darker than the dusk, the glimmer of half-bared arms, a touch of flower-like whiteness in her hair, a glint of gold on the lilial beauty of her breast, are all he can see. Yet she droops beneath his gaze, she hides her eyes on his arm, she shrinks, cowers, flutters like a linnet caught in a hot hand. . . .

There is silence in the room of roses, a silence fluent with the wordless speech of lovers joined after long grief and pain. . . . Then mere words.

“Alain, mon Alain !”

“Bluette, *Bluette* !”

Then “the delight of happy laughter, the delight of low replies.”

“I watched for you !”

“I longed for you !”

“You seemed a million moments late.”

“I sent myself on before,—my self was with you all the time !”

"I have you altogether now, dear,—self and body."

"Oh, hold me always, always! Promise that you will not turn me away!"

"Foolish one!" he laughs. "How could I? I could not live without you now!"

"Ah, but you will—turn me away!" She sobs the words.

"Foolish one, foolish little one, why should I? We can marry,—my false wife, she is found."

"Found? Where?" she whispers, timorously.

"In America. I can get divorced. Soon, soon. And then, my Blulette,—then——" He laughs. . . . "That terrible Aunt Servais of yours! She tried to keep me from you."

"She does not know—the poor faithful one! She fears for me, poor soul. She knows not. . . . She is in the dark . . . as you are, Alain!"

"Ah yes, it is dark,—I cannot see your beauty, dear one! Tenez, I loose you for one little moment, I light the candles,—to see your loveliness plain!"

"No, *no*!"

She clings to him, draws back his hand to her shoulder. "Not yet, not yet,—a little longer in the dark!" . . . She almost wails the words.

"Is it that you blush, foolish little one?" he murmurs. "Is it that you fear my eyes? . . . Why should you? . . . I am love, we go to marry soon,—you clad yourself fine for me, dear, did you not? I want to see my strange Blulette in her garments rich and rare. . . . One candle, one!"

"Not yet,—not yet,—a little longer in the darkness, Alain! . . . Keep me, hide me,—tell me you won't turn me away!"

"What folly, foolish one! Never could I!" He has disengaged his arms, he gropes for a light.

Suddenly heaven's own illumination comes, the sky is flame, wheeled rays of lightning lace the clouds, the room of roses is flooded with green and lilac light. She cowers from the revealing blaze.

"Alain, *Alain*! it is all the same!" she almost shrieks, and her hands fly up concealingly. But he sees, he has seen. A snow-tipped lock gleams in the umber of her hair, and, looped in a thread around her neck, a wedding-ring! It burns on her breast like a brand.

"My God!" The anger of heaven grows the truth at him. "*Lois*! My God!"

The fierce illumination dies; for an instant she sees him silhouetted against the window, then darkness floods the room. . . . Darkness and silence; silence, except for her sobs. Somewhere, somewhere down by the Place of Spurs, a dog is howling. It howls for Bluette, who is dead.

XXXIII

"More pages to her soul than most folk."

"**A**LAIN, Alain, it is all the same,—I am Bluettes!" she cried to him, through the double darkness that had fallen in the room.

She heard him mutter an imprecation and knew that he was groping for the door. "No, no, you *shall* not go!" she cried: her arms went out appealingly; they touched him, clutched him, sought to hold him back. "Alain, I'm your *wife*! . . . I *am* Bluettes . . . it is all the same!"

"Pretty grim, this! Twice,—twice!" he muttered as he groped.

He was hot with hate at the deception of it again, the disappointment of it, the irrevocable loss. "Pretty grim!" he muttered again. "She has killed her!" . . .

The new life, the life of love on which he had counted, was struck dead. Bluettes herself was dead . . . Bluettes, Bluettes!

"But, Alain, I love you! . . . I am yours, Alain,—Bluettes,—your *wife*!"

"That's the worst of it," he growled. "This is twice, you curst deceiver!" Her hands were round his arm; roughly he tore them away. "Pretty grim, this! Pretty grim!" His muttering died into silence.

"Alain, Alain!" she mourned . . . "speak to me . . . speak!"

"Speak!" he burst out. "What do you expect me to say? . . . It was Blulette I came here for,—not you. It was Blulette I loved,—not you. . . . And you've killed her, killed her,—killed my Blulette! . . . My God! No Blulette to hope for! no Blurette!" . . .

Dead, the beautiful singer, brave and pure in the midst of evil: dead, the heart that rejoiced, in peril and penury! . . . Why, *Blurette had never existed!* He had been fooled again! Twice! . . . "Better have croaked myself, this morning, before I knew!"

He was groping for the door.

"Blurette is not dead!" he heard her sob. "She is here, she is yours,—take her, take me, Alain! . . . See, I will be Blurette again,—I will be Blurette always,—I will *not* be Lois,—not Lois any more! . . . See, Alain, my pride is all gone. See, I kneel to you, I humble myself, Alain,—see, I beg for a little love! . . . Oh, you would forgive me if you knew!"

"I'll never forgive you!" he groaned. "You have fooled me twice now . . . I had a Blurette . . . she was here . . . she's dead . . . you've killed her . . . I'll never forgive,—not I!"

She could hear him groping away again. "Where's the door!" he was muttering. "Where's the damned door?"

A bellow of dry thunder sounded, lightning damascened the sky, again the room of roses was ghastly with lilac and green. Wild eyes, a white face, fierce imprecating lips were turned upon her in that revealing light. "No, *no!* don't look like that!" She fell at his knees.

He laughed dementedly. "What a curst fine lady you are, aren't you! . . . Blurette never wore a dinner-dress like that! . . . You're abominably like her, though . . . If I could crush the Lois out of you, I might have my Blurette again!" . . .

He had seized her, he was clutching her, her wrists were reddening and paining with the grip, but she smiled. "Yes, punish me! . . . Yes, hold me!" The wedding-ring lifted and lapsed with the quick heave and sob of her breast.

"My God, how like her!" . . .

"Yes, hold me, hurt me!" she wept.

"You're the devil's image of her!" . . .

"I *am* Blulette, Alain!—I won't be Lois any more—see, I am Blulette again,—I will always be Blulette! I—I love you, *love you!*"

Then darkness sabled the room again. Darkness, and sobbing, and in the fitful hush the distant howl of the cur. Then the clang of the Tower-door, and a noise of feet.

Steps, steps in the guard-room echoing! Steps, steps along the corridor, sounding hollow; and the fear of the unearthly froze him again. He flung her off and stared at the corridor-door; the hinging of it was outlined by pale light. "My God! what now! what next!"

A tap, the creak of the door, the incoming of light from a taper, and then the almost spectral visage of Tante Servais. "Grand dieu!" she faltered: the wife of Alain Tanger shrank back and hid from the eyes in that troubled old face.

"Grand dieu!" Tante Servais held the taper aloft and peered around the room of roses. "It is that these——"

"Come for your niece, are you, old Truepenny," he laughed hysterically. "She's dead!"

"Mon dieu! you have killed her!" the old woman panted. "Quick! Enter, Messieurs!" she cried. "It is murder! . . . Quick, *quick!*" Her eyes were searching for the dead.

There came a rush of feet from the corridor, and

next moment the taper flickered its light upon the anxious face of Jefford Goss.

"Good Lord! What's to do, man?—what's wrong here? What the——"

The fierceness of Alain Tanger's eyes arrested him: the old suspicion informed them with sudden hate that seemed the glowering of dementia. Goss paused, he smiled constrainedly,—“Nonsense, of course,—no end glad to see you, old man.” But he, too, was gazing furtively around.

“You come a bit late. The game's up, Goss. I know your precious great news already, man. . . . Come in,—come in and see your clever client. She's here, confound her! Look at her! . . . I had a pretty little singing girl here a bit ago . . . but she's dead. . . . Your client's work,—she's dead.”

“By the Lord, you're mad! Dead! *Who's* dead?” Tremor was in the lawyer's voice. . . . “Want some more light here, seems to me!” He snatched the taper. “Now!” he quavered, as candles began to glow. “Now let's see who's dead?” . . . His eyes were searching the floor.

Then, “What nonsense, old woman!” he frowned. “Nobody's killed,—you can see that for yourself, can't you? . . . Go away,—leave us. This is my friend,—and here's my client, too.” For Lois had stepped from the shadow of the boudoir-door, and “Ah, dear one, dear one!” Tante Servais gasped, as she kissed the shaking hands.

“Go, go, Tante Servais,” the wife of Alain Tanger said.

“It's all right now!” Goss called. “You can enter, M'sieur,—come in,—I'm the family solicitor, you know,—come in, the duel's over, it's all friends!” And as Tante Servais' faltering feet clacked out, into the room of roses came Filastre Groschaud.

The wife of Alain Tanger blanched, and again she shrank into the shadow of the boudoir-door; but for a moment only. "I come to warn M'sieur," the Major was saying, and then "Mon dieu, *mon dieu*!" he gasped, as he saw her there.

He blinked in pain. "You here! *You?* Mon dieu!" . . .

He had stiffened himself against the shock, he caught at the corridor-door for support, it swang and clicked behind him; he leaned against it, his shoulder pressing it hard, his unwounded hand trembling on the knob. There was silence in the room of roses again, though thunder loured within and without.

"It . . . matters . . . nothing. It is . . . all the same." The words came half-strangled from his throat. . . . "I—warn M'sieur . . . I come for that. . . . The gendarmes . . . he must fly."

"Gendarmes? . . . what for?" There was contempt in Alain Tanger's tone.

"To arrest you . . . for the duel," the soldier groaned.

"Who set them on?"

"Good Lord! be fair to him, Tanger,—*he* didn't!—it's very decent of him to come, all this way, with that arm. . . . He's helped me to find you,—be decent, man,—be fair!"

"*Who set them on?*"

"Not he, by the Lord,—and he can't stop 'em, of course! Be decent to him, I tell you!"

"*Who set them on?*"

"Some day I shall kill M'sieur," the soldier groaned.

"But now . . . it engages my honour that . . . M'sieur must escape . . . he must go *now*!"

"And leave you that—that woman, eh?"

"Alain, *Alain*!" she moaned, and, "By the Lord, be decent, Tanger, can't you? . . . Don't you see he'd rather

eat you than this?" cried Goss. "Why, man, you're mad—you must be, you are. . . . The fellow's a gentleman,—can't you see? . . . The better gentleman of the two, by gad!"

"You're right," said Alain Tanger, "he is . . . I ask his pardon. . . . You don't know what I've had to bear the last ten minutes, though. . . . Blulette is dead, M'sieur!"

"Alain, Alain!" she mourned, but he turned from her, imprecatingly. A while he fought with himself; then, "M'sieur the Major, I thank you,—I ask your pardon,—I was a cad,—forgive——"

"You shall escape . . . for the present," the soldier growled. "But I do not forgive. . . . Supplanter! Englishman! . . . Ah, if I could!"

Angrily he raised his slung arm, that rested on his breast, the braided sleeve hanging empty, the formless bandage touching the tunic-buttons. . . . "Ah, if I could!"

He moved from the door, he crooked his unwounded arm and bent towards the wife of Alain Tanger. "Come away, Ma'am'selle. . . . Let me take you back. To Brivac . . . I . . . all the same!"

"Why not?" her husband growled.

"*Why not!*" the Major flamed. "Ah, you beguile the girl, she comes to you, she puts herself with you, alone. In the darkness, sacrédie!"

"You think she's Blulette, don't you!" the other jeered. "But no, not at all. There never was a Blulette, my man! This is Lois Amaury Tanger. She's my wife . . . Don't you understand? She's my wife, my wife!"

"Your *wife!*" The cry rang terribly.

"It's true," Goss faltered. He shook, his fingers were tearing at his beard. "It's true, M'sieur . . . this is . . .

Mrs. Tanger." He blinked at his client. . . . "Mrs. Tanger will perhaps . . . explain?"

The soldier turned to her steadily. Pity and shame, and yet pride, were in her mien and voice as she answered his wordless appeal. "It is true," she said; "I am his wife." The words fell like a knell.

"Mon dieu! mon dieu!" The soldier slowly turned to the door; she sprang towards him.

"Never can I myself pardon!" she wept. "You are a brave man, you are a good gentleman,—I can never myself forgive. But . . . I did it for the King, I did it for——"

"The Duc d'Orléans!" her husband jeered. "A precious King to break men's hearts for!"

"Alain, *Alain*,—you do not know, you do not know!" she moaned. "He is the King . . . and you do not know!"

"This I know!" The response came quick and bitter. "I know this man and I tried to kill each other this morning through you and your damnable deceiving!"

She whitened. "I,—I did not know,—I . . . But you are safe,—*you* were not hurt?" she cried; her hands went clingly upon his shoulder.

A pang took Groschaud's heart at the sight of that caress. His features writhed; Goss saw, and pitied him. Her husband threw her touch off. "There's a brave man will never handle weapon again, through you," he growled.

"I did not know, I did not know!" she wept, and Goss took pity on her too.

"Madame!" he said . . . "won't you leave us, a little?"

"No, no. . . . See, Alain, I can explain,—I can explain it all,—I think you may forgive when you know. . . . But

you, M'sieur," she leaned towards Groschaud; "how can I explain to you, how can I atone?"

Tears misted her eyes as she caught at his unwounded hand. "See you," she said, "Bluette is dead,—no more songs, no more plotting . . . See this whiteness," her hand was at her hair, "it means I am his wife . . . I cannot atone, M'sieur—I am not free, not my own . . . but forgive the poor Bluette! She did it for her King!"

"Hush, hush!" the soldier groaned. "They will hear, they will have heard. . . . Ah, it is come, it is too late!" . . .

For now there was the noise of feet in the corridor, and the sharp whew of a whistle as the tread came to the halt. A scuffle in the corridor, a scream, a coarse laugh, and Tante Servais struggled in.

"Madame, Madame!" she moaned.

"For the King, eh! But it is treason, that, my oath!" a voice at the window-sill said; and into the room of roses from the garden stepped the Commandant of Gendarmes and Abbé Ledru.

XXXIV

"The Book of Revelation, its close leaves."

ALAIN TANGER'S wife cast herself shieldingly before her husband. "You shall not take him!" she cried.

"My oath, I've got to take you too!" the Commandant grinned. "Why can't a pretty wench leave politics alone, my cabbage?"

"Hold your tongue, idiot!" Her husband had drawn her back, and now set her aside. "Take me, if you like, but touch a finger to this,—this lady,—or say a word disrespectful, and I'll break your confounded neck, you gaudy ass!"

"Steady, steady now, Tanger!" Goss warned him. "It'll make things worse, you know!"

"Ah yes, indeed! M'sieur Smit had best be—peaceful, M'sieur Smit must beware!" came in the smooth suave accents of Abbé Ledru. "M'sieur, the Major, also, had best be tranquil;" for Groschaud was uttering his "Morbieu!" and fingering with his left hand at his sword. "The both must be tranquil, my faith!" and the Abbé beamed.

"*You*—you spy!" . . . Alain Tanger exploded, "By heaven, if you weren't a parson!" . . .

"Have no scruples for that, M'sieur," Ledru said, smiling. "See you,—is it the tonsure makes the priest? My faith, no! See you, I have the honour to present

my card. . . . M'sieur will observe that I am Leroux, Commissary of Police, of Paris! I spik Ingleesh, aoh yes!"

The Commandant guffawed. "My oath! The great Joseph Leroux, from the Prefecture of Paris! The great Joseph Leroux, himself! All the world has heard of Joseph Leroux. My oath! yes!"

Alain Tanger's clenched hand dropped to his side.

"Clever disguise, hein?" The great Joseph Leroux smiled superior. "Nobody suspects a Commissary under a cassock, eh? I even shave a tonsure! . . . Me, I am artist in disguises. Dame, yes!"

"You will have spied on me as well, perhaps?" Groschaud growled, his left hand at his sword.

"Of course. But that is what I was in Brivac to do. Oh, take it in a manner tranquil, mon officer,—don't touch that sword. Gendarmes are outside. Six. It is odds,—but only now that M'sieur the Major is disabled!" he flattered. . . . "Madame, be seated, I beg . . . Messieurs, I pray you be seated! We must converse a little."

He closed the window, returned to the centre of the room, and upon the table spread some papers in the light, looking sideways up from them with a smile.

"*You* were the thief, then?" Alain Tanger cried.

The Commissary laughed. "M'sieur the Major, behold your letter to the blackamoor. I took it from the pocket of M'sieur Smit, in his bedroom. I am a famous somnambule,—and yet, I snore like a pig!"

"Tenez, M'sieur the Major,—here is your letter so compromising! A letter not treasonable, maybe, but a letter that compromises—dame, yes! M'sieur the Major refused the money, but he responded. That was not wise of M'sieur the Major! His duty was to inform M'sieur the Prefect at once."

"Be a sneak, like you!" growled Groschaud.

"I thank you, M'sieur the Major. I do not resent. I have my orders. I am to be judicious with the famous soldier of France. See, I remove the letter; from the world." He held it in the candle-flame. "See, it is ash, it is not,—nay, it never was! M'sieur the Major is innocent, M'sieur the Major is free!"

"And the bank-notes?" Alain Tanger scowled.

"Behold the receipt! The blackamoor accuses reception of them. They were his property, is it not? Ah well, he now has them. With grand pleasure I give the receipt to M'sieur Smit."

"But what then? Have you let the beggar out of jail?"

"But certainly; and also out of France. At this moment he travels to Bordeaux, under guard. We dismiss him by ship. A-oh, yes!" he mocked.

"Hanged if I understand half this." Goss bent his brows. "What's this about a blackamoor?"

"M'sieur de Smit and the blackamoor, they were watched from the first," smiled the great Leroux. "*A-oh, yes, chocking!* M'sieur de Smit and the blackamoor, they were watched at Paris. At the house of the Princesse Mathilde. Also at the Bank of France. Also at the railway-station, Paris-Orléans. By wire electric, was I not warned that M'sieur's ticket was for Brivac? And the black man, was he not watched at Angoulême,—and Limoges,—and Vignols-the-Village, hein? Oh, it is quite simple, to the skill of a Joseph Leroux."

"Deuced simple!" Alain Tanger growled. . . . "I've been fooled all round, of course. . . . What next?"

"The next is that we arrest M'sieur Smit, for the duel."

"But you shall not!" Lois faced the Commissary imperiously. "You dare not, if you knew!"

"Tenez, tenez, be you careful, Madame! I have the power to arrest a certain Ma'am'selle Blulette."

"You can't! She's dead, dead!"

"What nonsense, dead!" the Commandant said. "*This* is Blulette,—in fine feather, only. I go to arrest her, is it not, M'sieur Joseph Leroux?"

"Morbleu! I take a hand in this!" The Major was pressing forward.

"M'sieur the Major will be wise to rest himself tranquil. M'sieur is himself involved."

"As how?" the soldier frowned.

"An officer sworn to the Republic of France, makes he rendezvous with Royalists, hein? Why went M'sieur the Major to the preaching at Duramadour? But for the conflagration so-sudden, would not M'sieur the Major have drawn the sword?"

"Morbleu! Maybe!"

"But that was my fault,—it was *my* plan only!" Lois cried. "*I* am to blame for that."

"Truly you speak, Madame,—it was all for the beautiful eyes of Blulette. So Madame also becomes involved. Madame conspires. Against the Republic. Madame must leave France immediate. Her ship awaits her at Royan, is it not? Madame will proceed to Royan, by the first train; in the escort of the so-fortunate Commandant."

"But I shall not," she said.

"Then Madame will proceed to prison."

"It's enough if you take me, isn't it?" her husband growled.

"It will be enough, if Madame promises to leave France immediate."

"But I shall not," again she said.

"What rot, what nonsense all this is!" Goss interposed. "Why prison at all? For anybody? *Why* should you jail my friend?"

"For the duel," said Joseph Leroux.

"What rot, my dear M'sieur! For a duel? In *France*?"

"Parbleu!" said the Commissary with a half-smile, "M'sieur fails to comprehend. I wonder not, but,—see you, I play cards upward, as always. I cannot arrest M'sieur for Bonapartism. That would involve the Major. It would not be being judicious. As I am commanded to be. By the Prefect, at Paris. Ah, well, I must be judicious, then. I arrest M'sieur de Smit all the same. His little plot, it is over. His plot, it was nothing, bah! But I arrest him, all the same!"

"Why, *why*, by the Lord?" the lawyer demanded. "Why not let him clear out to England? Why?"

"Dame! did he not shoot the hero of Siam! And Siam, that counts in France! The Government of the Republic, it has had much botheration about Siam! Mon dieu, yes! And can an Englishman be permitted to break the sword-hand of the hero of Siam?" Cynically he smiled, and "Peste, no! I should think not, *I!*" he answered himself.

"But why not?" said Goss, fingering his beard.

"Dame! and the beautiful newspapers of France! And *La Presse*! And *La Patrie*! And *Le Soir*! Also Forain and Véber, and Willy, and the Marquis Henri? But all the pens of France, indeed,—what shall they not say, to-morrow, if M'sieur de Smit goes free? Dame, the Government of the Republic, can it withstand all the pens of France?"

"Why not? Goss persisted.

"Peste! but M'sieur the second Englishman is difficult! Me, I know my business. M'sieur de Smit, is he not English? And did he not shoot the so-famous hero of Siam?"

"But,—but how if M'sieur should *not* be English?" The wife of Alain Tanger trembled, her voice had risen to a high note,

The Commissary stared. "Ah,—if he were not English,—if he were French, by example——"

"Yes, yes?" she questioned thrillingly, as he paused.

"It would be different then. The duel then would be just an ordinary affaire. Between Frenchmen. For the beautiful eyes of Blulette." He bowed.

Her beautiful eyes were brilliant, her face was hectic, hysteria swelled in her throat. "M'sieur Leroux, I think,—oh, I think that you have watched me long! Have you not, have you not?"

"And what pleasure! To watch Madame!"

"M'sieur Leroux, I think that . . . that perhaps you know who . . . I really . . . am?"

"I do, Madame." This time his bow was almost reverential. "That is why I held off the gendarmes, after Duramadour, from Blulette. Madame is not Blulette,—by any means, no! Madame is Madame la Duchesse."

"What, what?" Alain Tanger started, lurched, turned fiercely round.

"*Madame la Duchesse?* . . . Blulette!" faltered Groschaud.

"Then . . . then——" Alain Tanger was clutching at a chair. . . . Good heavens, what could it mean,—what could it mean?—Lois,—Duchesse?

His wife came swiftly to him, for he reeled to his chair. Her hands were on his arm. "Alain, Alain!" . . . she said, with the saddest of smiles. "Still more deception, Alain. . . . You can never forgive me now!"

Was there irony in her words? He frowned at her in the effort to decide. But she was speaking to the Commissary of Police, the sad smile had given place to eagerness; she surely was in earnest now.

"See you, my yacht, it lies at Royan, M'sieur Leroux. I go to it. . . . I shall leave France to-morrow—perhaps

for always. I meant so to do,—to-morrow,—it was my plan. But I cannot go alone. My husband, he may go too?"

"Your husband, Madame?" The Commissary was puzzled now. "I knew not that Madame was married. Is it not that Madame is Duchesse in her own right?"

"Perhaps," she sadly said. "But nevertheless, behold my husband." Trouble spoke in her voice as she touched the figure huddled in the chair. "M'sieur the Commissary, you have to be judicious, is it not? Ah well, then you cannot arrest this gentleman. This is Alain, my husband,—he is French,—he is Duc de Thanneguy!"

"Good God!" Alain de Thanneguy, dazed as he was, had heard. He was on his feet now, swayingly. "It isn't true—I'm English—it's——"

"But it *must* be true, man!" Jefford Goss shouted at him. "I see the whole thing now,—by the Lord, I do!" He tore at his beard as he turned upon his client. "You are deep, Madam!" he said, "you are deep!"

"I need your pardon also, Mr. Goss," she sadly said. "I deceived you too. It is my lot to deceive. But to you I am not bound to explain." She spoke with a proud lift of her head. "I shall explain—to my husband. . . . A moment, M'sieur the Commissary. Permit me: I shall not run." She passed into the boudoir-room; her husband sank back in his chair.

The five men stared at each other in silence, until, "My *oath*!" the Commandant gasped, in such a tone that laughter broke the strain. But Tanger and Groschaud did not laugh.

"Dame! I am, then, outwitted myself! Ah, I am outwitted, I take shame,—I am done, if M'sieur is M'sieur le Duc," Leroux was saying, as Lois Amaury, Duchesse de Thanneguy, returned.

"Alain!" She touched her husband's shoulder. Slowly he turned his head, with almost a stupid gaze. "The secret is told too soon," she murmured. "See,—I had written it down for you,—it was for you I was writing it, yesterday morning!—you remember—you saw me? It was for you to read,—that you might understand. It is all here."

He clutched at her wrist, and struck the papers to the floor, and an oath burst from the soldier's lips at that.

She freed her wrist. "Wait, Alain, we are not alone: you shall punish me . . . when. . . ."

He sank back in his chair; his eyes were dull again, he lay there slackly. "My Jove!" he muttered. . . . "*My Jove!*"

"M'sieur Leroux!"—she turned to the Commissary—"you cannot arrest my husband,—it would not be being judicious," she said, with a white smile. "But believe me, we shall not conspire again,—I give my word. . . . You will withdraw the gendarmes, is it not? At once?"

"Dismiss your men, mon Commandant. Nothing more to do here, Commandant of my soul. We go, beloved Commandant,—*all* of us go, is it not?" The great Leroux looked at Goss, and then at Groschaud.

"Madame!" the word came raucous from the Major's throat; he bowed, and as he bowed he reeled. She caught at him, with a little cry; she held his arm a moment. "Forgive!" she mourned. "Forgive the poor Bluettes!"

"I—I——" He passed his hand across his brow. "I—do not—understand."

"I shall explain," said Goss. "Come, Messieurs,—come!" And husband and wife were left in the room of roses alone.

THE EXPLICATION

XXXV

"He was a very good hater."

"**A** LAIN!" There was rue in her voice, . . .
"Alain!" . . . There was fear.

Her hands quavered towards him timorously, appealingly. She touched him, he did not stir. Slack and aslant in his chair, he was staring past the candle-flame out into the darkness of night. The voice of departing thunder saluted him, but he did not hear it: his thoughts were treading a mill-horse round.

Thanneguy—Tanguy—Tanger: Alain Tanger, Alain de Thanneguy: Alain Charles de Thanneguy, Charles Alain Tanger, Charles Alain de Thanneguy—the names were ringing the changes in his brain. . . . The white lock—"Thy father's father wore it, and thy father bore it"—the fateful year 'Fourteen,—Pope, King, Wellington,—prisoners of war,—the bay, the cockboat and the schooner, *Foy au Roy*, Tanger, Thanneguy, Alain Charles, Charles Alain, Lois Amaury Tanger de Thanneguy,—what tingling dance of words and miseries was this?

"My God!" he groaned, "why did you——? Why didn't you——? You were too false to tell me straight,—at first!"

"I wrote it down," she pleaded. "I thought you might

be impatient, and—interrupt. . . . I wanted you to know it . . . all through, first. . . . I meant you to know it to-night! . . . Read it, before you judge. . . .”

“Tanger, Thanneguy, bezants d’or, a fallen house—*Foy au Roy*, Thanneguy, Tanger, Tan. . . .” The clang of the Tower-door roused him a little from the dancing and buzzing round of his thoughts.

“What do you say?” he muttered. “What was it you said?”

She motioned him to the papers; she had lifted them and spread them before him. “Read,” she pleaded. “You may understand if you read. Read!—you may think I——”

But he pushed the papers to the floor again. Dazedly he shook his head. “You—you got me here for this! . . . you planned . . .”

“Because I am your—wife!” Her voice broke on the word. “Because I love you . . . I was proud and wicked, I know,—I don’t understand, now, how I could do it. . . . But, Alain, . . . I obeyed my father . . . and the King! . . . *Foy au Roy, Foy au Roy!*” she sobbed.

“*You* didn’t bring me here, did you?” he muttered vacantly. “It was Bluettes . . . I loved Bluettes”

“Don’t, *don’t!*” she wept. “I can’t bear it, Alain! . . . You—you are so strange!” she almost screamed. “I can’t bear it, indeed I can’t!”

She had sunk to her knees, her face was hiding against his chair, her hands were trembling up to him again.

He twisted round to escape her touch, and to stare at her. “You—*you!*” he began. “Why, it was you that . . . you married me, didn’t you? . . . I don’t want *you!* . . . Where’s my Bluettes . . . I came for Bluettes . . . Bluettes hasn’t a white lock like that . . . Bluettes never ran off with my ring. . . . It was Lois Amaury stole my ring, curse her!”

"Look, it is on my heart!" she sobbed, and blushing she lifted the white beauty of her bosom towards his eyes. "It has always been here, Alain. . . . See, it is bright, it has not been sullied!" A prouder note rang in her voice just then.

"Bluette never ran from me," he muttered. "I want Bluette—*I want Bluette*, I tell you." . . .

"But see, I will be Bluette again,—I will be Bluette always—I *am* Bluette, Alain,—see!"

"She's dead!" he groaned. . . . "I don't know where they've put her . . . do you?"

"She's here, Alain! She's alive, she's here with you now! Take her, Alain,—crush the horrible pride out of her,—crush the Lois out of me! . . . Oh, can't you see? I'm Bluette again,—you shall be Alain Tanger again, we might be happy together" . . .

"Devilish plausible!" he said, arousing himself. "Always cunning and plausible, confound you! What a schemer you are! . . . What an actress! . . . You're acting now, by God you are!—you know it."

"Don't, *don't*, Alain . . . I can't bear it!" she sobbed. "I'm your wife,—you mustn't be so hard on me, Alain,—see, I love you,—I have learned to love you, now!" . . .

"Too late!" he groaned. "It's too late for that!" and then with a nervous ejaculation he sprang up, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, his body leant forward, terrified. A tap on the corridor-door had shaken him into fierce tremor. "What's that! *what's that!*" he whispered. "What next! What next, confound you? . . . Pretty grim, this . . . pretty grim!" . . .

The door fell open slowly and the grey face of Tante Servais was seen. "They are gone, the gendarmes," she whispered, as she crept tremulously into the ring of candle-light. "Ah, Madame!" She kissed the cold hand of

her mistress. "Ah, what disgrace!" Her eyes were furtive on the man. "Oh, Madame—you will not now,—you *can* not!"

"Eh, what d'ye say? Gendarmes? Gone?" He stared at her. "Then go yourself, old woman!"

"No, no,—stay!" her mistress trembled. "Stay with me . . . he's . . . he's . . . I am beginning to be afraid!"

"Off with you, Truepenny, old girl!"

"But no,—but no indeed, M'sieur? Who are *you*, to command?" The old woman faced him boldly. "It is for M'sieur to go. M'sieur must go at once. What right has M'sieur here? . . . M'sieur promised to go, he *promised*." . . .

He turned a face of stupid smiles upon her, and she shrieked. "M'sieur is—is——"; her eyes turned to the wine on the table. . . . "M'sieur promised, M'sieur will recall that he promised! To respect Madame! . . . to go!"

Savagely he laughed at her. "Respect Madame? Why, Madame's my *wife*! This isn't Bluette, this is Lois Amaury Tanger! She's my wife!"

"M'sieur lies! It is an insult to say it! Madame is *not*! Madame is Duchesse de . . ."

"Hush, old friend;" her mistress touched her shoulder; "you do not know. It is true, what M'sieur says. I am his wife. That is why I—" she blushed—"that is why he is . . . here. . . ."

"But never, then, Madame! Never could Madame so lower herself! Never could she wed a—common English,—who is mad, or drunk . . . like this!"

"Hush, hush!" her mistress pleaded. "You do not know what you say, Tante Servais . . . M'sieur has griefs against me. . . . You must respect M'sieur. M'sieur is noble, M'sieur is my cousin . . . he is my husband, your master,—he is the Duc!"

"*Never!* it cannot be!" The woman steadied herself against the table.

"Do him your obeisance, Tante Servais. Do him the obeisance of the Servais. . . ."

The old face whitened more. "I—don't—comprehend,—Madame! There is no seigneur! The last, he died . . . with Edmond Servais . . . out there, where the blood drips at night!" She thrilled and screamed,—"I saw it yesterday again . . . the wet blood . . . on the stair!"

Her mistress shivered. "Do your obeisance! He is your seigneur, Tante Servais."

"But no,—I do not understand——"

"Nor I, old Truepenny!" He harshly laughed. "I'm not your seigneur, I . . . I'm a poor beggar of an Englishman. . . . My wife ran away from me, Tante Servais! . . . Take that fine lady away too. . . . It's Blulette I want—it's your pretty little niece I want. . . . I want her here . . . all night! . . . my little Blulette!"

"But—but then . . . he's mad, Madame! He is quite mad!" the old woman gasped. "Come away quick, Madame! . . . It isn't safe. . . . Let me fetch gendarmes, to take him to the hotel-dieu!"

"Hush! No,—I shall go away myself,—we will leave him." With a proud sigh she moved from her husband's side. "M'sieur the Duc is not at ease,—he does not comprehend. . . . Light me the candles yonder. . . . I will leave M'sieur the Duc" . . .

Silence; silence in the room of roses; no word, no stir from the man slouched in the chair; no word from the beautiful lady who stands aloof from him at last. Silence, silence; until Tante Servais returns.

"Madame la Duchesse is lighted."

"It is well, my friend, . . . Now go."

"But no, Madame!—it is not safe for Madame——"

"Go, *go*!" Her mistress speaks imperiously; Tante Servais yields, the old feet falter out.

Silence again; until, in a voice as proud as it is hopeless, she bids him farewell.

"I brought my heart to you," she says; "you tread upon it . . . you are merciless . . . you do not forgive me even a little. . . . Do you think I now can ever forgive *you*?"

He does not turn nor speak.

"You are very proud, Alain; but so am I. . . . You are cold and hard; I can be cold and hard. . . . Oh, I came to you so gladly,—" her voice broke in a sob,—"*I think you have killed my heart, Alain; it is hard and dead . . . like yours.*"

He does not speak nor stir.

"Good-bye!" she whispers. "You have broken my hope" . . .

A moment yet she pauses, but he does not speak nor stir. She passes into the lit boudoir; the door closes with a click. He is silent, in the room of roses, alone.

XXXVI

"Belle comme Vénus,
Riche comme Crœsus,
Innocent comme Dreyfus."

AT last he had risen, he was standing in the window-bay, he was staring out across the hanging-garden with hardly seeing eyes.

Night was now fully come, upon the glass fell the tapping fingers of the rain, a wet twinkle of lights shone from the bourg below. Somewhere down there Jefford Goss would be supping; that clever sham priest and that poor beggar of a Groschaüd, they would be supping there too; unless they had taken train to Brivac. Suddenly he felt hunger himself. Food was on the table; ravenously he began to eat; he poured himself glass after glass of wine. Then, almost automatically, he lit a cigar. . . .

Ah, that was better! the trembling of hand and head was ceasing, the nervous jerk of the neck was gone, the buzz of recurrent names and weary round of thought were past. Ah! that was better! Benign tobacco soothed him, the horrible nervous tension slackened, he began to feel sane.

"My God! time too!" he muttered. "Pretty grim it's been . . . shocks I've had to bear!"

Like an echo the memory of his wife's last words came to him. Good-bye, was it? *What* was it she said?

"*You have broken my hope,—good-bye?*" Was that it? . . . He tried to remember.

Ah well,—let her go! He puffed the smoke from his lips rapidly. . . . Come! that was better! Food and wine and tobacco had comforted and restored him. He began to feel himself—almost his old self again.

Himself? But who was he, then? How could any man remain himself through all he had had to endure?

Suddenly, in an hour, all the past and prospect of his life had suffered change. He knew now what a tree transplanted must feel, he had the same sensation surely,—the groping of root and rootlet into new soil, the apprehensive trembling forth of leaf and fibre into strange air. . . . Not to be an Englishman . . . to be French, to be torn on a sudden from the cold, firm, rooting of the Imperial Isle. . . . What, why?—but it was impossible!—it could not be so,—he was day-dreaming again, dreamer that he had always been! . . . Bluette was a dream. Bluette had never breathed. . . . And Lois . . . the beautiful and false,—Lois his bride untouched,—no, she *could* not be yonder, behind that slammed door!

And if she were? Good God,—she had masqueraded . . . in a café . . . singing to anybody . . . for sous!

"Good God!" He rose, and aimlessly began to wander in the room, shunning to near the shut door. He drew long breaths; the air in the room seemed sweetly stifling; the roses were sending out the luxurious heavy scent of incipient decay.

The life of a rose is short, he meditated. All life is short. What a fool the man who gathers not roses while he may! If she had not deceived so! . . . Good heavens, the temptation! . . . Beyond that slammed door the very rose of roses was throbbing, the dew of fresh tears

on her petals, the flush of blushes rich on her clustered charms. . . .

His heart began to hurry. . . . Her heart was hard and dead,—wasn't that what she said?

The words came to his ear in her voice. He started, was she near? . . . it was almost as if she had uttered them again. . . .

He must have been stupefied, he reflected,—he must have borne himself like a cad! . . . His wife,—yes, she was his wife,—a rose of clustered beauties, ripe, and unplucked, and rare! . . .

Gather ye roses while ye may! . . . and she was his to gather. Why, she might be yonder yet! behind that door. . . .

She loved him, she said; she was beautiful and proud and pure; she was his, *his*!—his bride untouched, the very rose of brides, and his to cull! . . . A verse of his own came to his mind. "And there the passionate lyric glows, a rose!" . . . That door would not be locked!

His heart was racing now, blood beat in his temples, a vein there was turgid. He took a swift step towards the near shut door. Then, "No, no, no," he muttered. "She schemed, she lied and deceived! I *won't* yield! She showed herself on a stage!—my wife! . . . for sous! . . ."

And—yet,—and yet,—what was the secret of the mystery? "*Foy au Roy! Foy au Roy!* I did it for the King!" she had cried. . . . What had she really to say for herself in it all? The secret of the mystery, she had written it for him, she said. He caught the folded manuscript from the floor.

Page upon page of strong, swift handwriting, his wife's, though he did not know the hand!

"Alain!" her apologia began. He seemed to *hear* the

word,—in the voice of Blulette. . . . A mist dulled his eyes,—or did the candle-flame dazzle? . . . He bent his stiffneckedness nearer the page.

“ I am writing what I dare not try to say. You would not find patience to *hear* me to the end; but I beg you to read. There is so much to explain, and I shall do it clumsily, because I know I explain too late. But my pride itself implores you to read. Pride at this moment rebels in my pen. But it is pride which makes me go on. I hate to have to confess, but I long for you to understand. But do not think that my confession is an appeal. My pride cannot bear that you should think I am hoping you will forgive.

“I was brought up to be proud, Alain. As a child I was led to expect a title and a noble niche. I was born amidst an untitled people, I belonged to a democratic nation. That very contrast made me prouder of my noblesse. What other girls buy in marriage, I had by birth. Then, later, to that kind of conceit I joined the pride of maidenhood; I was taught in a convent that soilure is the meaning of man's love.

“I married you, you will say,—but it was ancestral pride made me do that. I left you, but that was my physical pride. I deceived you in London cruelly. I met you again, and again deceived you; but that was born of my earlier sin. The fear comes to me horribly that you will think I am deceiving you now.

“But see, Alain, I have now no motive to deceive, I am not pleading, I am not extenuating, I do not hope for the least forgiveness. I am writing the truth, because all I hope is that you may understand. I want you not to think me the utter wretch you do.

“I *had* to hide myself from you after I fled. Many

times I felt that I must go back, and keep my wedding-vow. But my vow to my father forbade that, I was working out my pledge to him. Now, at all costs to my work, I must tell you all. Yet—it is habit—I insult you again when I write ‘at all costs,’ because I now know that you are too chivalrous to betray.

“Oh, I mistook you, Alain, in London. I deceived myself that time. Pride persuaded me that you *must* be common and base. But you are noble, and straightforward, and” . . . He saw that these words were blurred . . . “yesterday you saved my life.

“That first time, on the terrace, I was helpless for the moment, and I almost let you be sure. Then I saw your eyes go to my hair, for the whiteness I keep twisted out of sight. Then I knew that I could deceive you, and I cheated you three times after that. And yesterday it was you who saved my life.

“I could die when I think of what you were to me yesterday. If my life were my own you should soon be free from Lois. But I am pledged. I must live, because I am vowed. I have tried to get you away from Brivac. Your life is in danger here, I am fatal to you at every point. Major Groschaud is dangerous for you. I confessed my ill-doings to the Mother Superior, so that she might get you to go away. Groschaud is ready to turn upon me, and demand the price I cannot pay. Don’t think that I ever meant him to believe that I could marry him, Alain,—I am not so wicked as that! He is another brave man I have misled.

“Oh, I am tired, tired of plotting, but I must plot till you have read this and are gone. Then I can disappear, and you will never hear of Bluetie again. I am hurrying this poor explanation, because you may detect me at any moment, before I can explain. I so *want* to explain, I

care so much that you should understand. If only I had been frank at first! But I was so prudish and cautious. I thought you might not marry me if I told you the secret beforehand. It was so essential that you should marry me that I flinched at the risk. Yet I am so unreasonable that when you agreed to marry me, I hated you for that. That was why I kept myself so apart. That is why I never knew what you really are. We might be happy to-day, if I had known."

His lips were working strangely; he sighed as he read.

"I know you now. The husband I fled from is honest and brave and generous. You will not let yourself woo Blurette because there is a Lois, and because—this is what touches me most—because of the good name of Blurette. You do not woo, though you might,—oh, why don't you, why don't you! We might have won happiness that way,—you always Alain Tanger and I always Blurette. We are husband and wife really, I could have deceived you in that happy way to the end. For—I will confess even this—I think I have begun to love you, husband,—I see that love of man need not be soilure now. I feared and hated passion before,—I hated the humiliation of it, that was why I fled from you at the last, before night could come. It was impulse made me quit you, Alain, I had not planned it, believe me! It was bodily shrinking, and pride in my passionless detachment, which spurred me to do that. But now, it is even sweet to humble myself to you, it is something of love's joy to tell you this.

"Yesterday you were cool and gay in the face of danger, and prompt and resourceful and masterful, as a man ought to be. You saved my life and asked no pay, you did not follow me to the Café pestering, as a Frenchman would

have done, you were not petulant, nor insulting to me, when I seemed ungrateful, when I was bitter with the humbling which your goodness had put upon my pride. There is just nothing French in you at all, you are English, in spite of our descent. If you were *only* English, if we were plain English and American Tangers, then I could be free from my task, and yield myself to you, and we could flee together, and I would so cajole you with loving plots that you should never regret and never know. But *Foy au Roy*, I must pay the price, I must carry the burden, though I am no longer strong. I am weak with love for my husband, Alain,—I am at a pass,—my father, my love, my vow!”

The strong, square handwriting broke off there; and in a flash of visual memory he saw again Blulette tearful, Blulette up-springing, dropping the pen, hiding her writing, and trembling before him, in the parlour gay with flowers and cheery with the chirping of birds. . . .

His lip trembled at that remembrance. . . . The ink of her writing that day had scarcely dried when she challenged his entrance. Her cry of test and trial rang in his ears again. “*But respond to me, then—behold the third time I make the same question! Why M’sieur has come?*”

What power in this girl! What genius for dissembling! At such a moment, in such a way, to challenge the husband to whom she had been writing such a confession the minute before! . . .

He remembered what followed, and shame darkened his face. . . . He had caught at her hand, he had essayed to woo her basely . . . and she so proud of him because he had not wooed! . . . And later . . . Tante Servais . . . his passion of longing! . . . “Good God, what a cur, what a cur!”

What he had read thus far must have been written before she knew that he would try to woo. What she had written thus far showed her hopeless that he could forgive. . . . But since then . . . ah, he could understand the incredible sunburst of hope upon her. . . . That was why she changed her plans : hope would transform her plotting. . . . And when he had told her his love, she must try it and sound it still. "*Marry me, then!*" she cried, as final touchstone of test. . . . "*See you, mon ami, I have been blind, I am no longer cold, I love you, I shall yield!*" . . .

"Oh, damnable tangle of things!" self-pity moaned in him. Was ever a man so tried and so beguiled!

"Confession, yes!" he muttered, as he crushed under his arm the pages he had read. "But can she *explain?*"

XXXVII

"It is not far from New England to old France."

"**T**HE Chevalier Louis Luc Amaury de Thanneguy, cadet of his House," the manuscript began again, "youngest and then only brother of Charles Alain Marie Felix, last known Seigneur de Thanneguy, who was slain in the year 1792.

"Louis Luc Amaury de Thanneguy sailed for the new United States of America in the train of the famous Lafayette; was still in America when news came from France of the murder of his brother the Duc, the abolition of the titles of nobility, and the sequestration of the Thanneguy domains. Giving up the idea of returning to France, he settled on an estate on the Hudson. He had become naturalised as an American citizen, and was married. He died in the year 1814, before the Restoration, leaving an only surviving son.

"This son had name Luc Amaury Tanger, whose son was Luke Amaury Tanger, whose only son was Luke Tanger, whose only child was Lois, or Louise Amaury Tanger, born at Albany, 1877.

"That is the chronicle of the junior branch of the House.

"Alain Charles Marie, Comte de Thanneguy, only scion of Charles Alain Marie Felix, Duc de Thanneguy. He escaped from France, after the murder of his father and the loss of the domains; joined the army of Condé,

at Coblenz; was sent to England to carry succours thence by sea to the Royalists insurgent in Brittany and Vendée. He afterwards settled in England, near Weymouth. His surviving son was called Charles Alain Tanger, by the same corruption of name as in the case of the cadet branch. Charles Alain Tanger had issue Alain Charles Tanger, whose only child is Alain Tanger.

"That is the chronicle of the senior line.

"Alain de Thanne-guy, *dit* Tanger, was married to Louise Amaury de Thanne-guy, *dit* Tanger, March 1899.

"The pedigrees given here are not complete. But it is certain that my husband is the direct descendant and nearest heir of Alain Charles Marie, Comte (and legally Duc) de Thanne-guy, who was dispossessed during the first French Revolution and not reinstated, nor called to Court, upon the Restoration in 1814. There is a *shameful reason* why he was not recalled. . . ."

"What reason, then?" the reader muttered. Something shameful? . . . That would be why the family history had been kept so secret from himself. . . .

Lois Amaury's father was ignorant of the existence of any descendant by the right line, the manuscript went on to tell. He supposed himself to be by inheritance Luke, Duc de Thanne-guy. He was proud of that. But he never assumed the title, of course; he was an American citizen, he used to say,—the son and grandson of plain American Tangers. His first American forefather had fought for Democratic Independence; he belonged to the Democratic Party himself; he would have been ashamed to play the French noble and show what his political and business friends would consider the weakness of family

pride. "*I* mustn't sport the title, Lois," he used to say, "I should never hear the end of the laugh."

Besides, he had been in trade, he would be only a shopkeeper Duc, he had "never learned the Duc profession," he used to jest. But for his daughter he felt the Thanneguy pride. His daughter should come into her heritage, she certainly should. "*Foy au Roy*, my girl,—you shall be a Duchesse born." A Duc was something considerable, he said,—not like a cheap common Baron or Count.

It was for her succession that Luke Tanger hunted out and bought the old mansion of the Thanneguys in the St. Germain quarter of Paris, and acquired the family château and its immediate demesne. He vested this property by an instrument so executed that the mansion, the château, and the land, with the revenue from the land, should always pass to the head of the House of Thanneguy. "Our House shall stand again, and last, my girl," he used to say. His daughter was to be the first inheritor, unless a claimant with more right should arise. But that he never expected.

"My husband Alain, though he does not know it, is head of our house," the manuscript went on. "Half the two thousand pounds a year is really his *by right*,—the revenue of his estate, under the instrument and my father's will."

With an exclamation the reader rose. But the manuscript drew him; the manuscript trembled in his fingers as he held it closer to the light.

The rest of Luke Tanger's wealth was willed to his daughter: he was rich, the money had come almost at one stroke, when she was six years old. In the same year

happened their great loss and grief,—her mother died. Lois could hardly remember her, but she remembered the grieving for her, she had felt the miss of her many a time since then : particularly since her father died,—and, most of all, she wrote, “just now !”

Her father mothered her while father and daughter dwelt together. He was good and proud, she loved to think of him as an Abraham Lincoln minus the awkwardness and angles. His French blood gave him grace of bearing, he was a father for a girl to be proud of, to be enthusiastic over, to live for,—almost to die for in the effort to obey. He did not know how hard upon her that effort was to come to be. “If he were alive now, he would forgive me, and let me be free !”

The girl was to be Duchesse de Thanneguy. Always she was to remember *Foy au Roy*. That was the proud legend of their House, she was to live up to it ; such was her father's strict command. Republicanism was good and right for America, but not for France, and not for the head of a noble house like theirs. *Foy au Roy* ; she was to serve the dispossessed King, just as their ancestors had served His Majesty's own. She was to serve the King so utterly that—and here the bargaining, business habit came into play,—that His Majesty could not refuse to recognise her in the title so long abeyed.

“Money like water, and painful labours, and any high service that His Majesty can claim, my girl !” her father used to say. “You are to follow the tradition of the Thanneguys. *Foy au Roy*. You've got to gain the title and re-establish the House. I only wish I dare do it for you myself, my dear.”

When she was twelve years old he took her to England, for first she was to learn to be an English gentlewoman, he said. “You mustn't go to the King as an American

girl," he was sure. "They tell me Americans don't ever get to the real inside."

For three years the father and daughter dwelt together in England, learning to know its lanes and villages and old-world towns and splendid ancient mansions. "Ours is as noble a château, and, I believe, a more illustrious line," the father would tell her, as they stood in view of Belvoir, or Burleigh, or Hatfield. He said that he should almost like her to marry the heir of a place like these. "But you must marry to help the King, my dear,—do what the King says about that, and don't you forget it!"

In her fifteenth year they went to France, and to Thanneguy. They drove, in the old seigneur style, from Angoulême to the château, by the road the Revolutionary murderers went. "Don't approve of Republicanism of that kind!" her father growled. They wandered over their ruined château, like ordinary Anglo-Saxon visitors. '*Foy au Roy*,' her father muttered; there was surely something wet on his cheek as he pointed to the fire-blackened old blazon.

"Ah, these good folks don't ever dream I'm their seigneur, bless 'em! . . . We've got to keep it secret till we can tell it to the King," he said, and for that reason the château must remain almost untouched until the restoration of the title.

"Even Tante Servais never knew, till a year or so ago, when I came again,—alone, alas! and showed her the King's letter. She does not know I'm married, she will not know that the Englishman who, I shall tell her to-night, may come to the Lodge to-morrow—asking for *Bluette*—is her lord and seigneur, poor soul!

"It is part of my plan for gaining Alain back, that she shan't know, at first. I daren't tell her beforehand,—she would betray the secret to him in her loyal pride! She

knows that I am "Bluette" at Brivac. She knows that I do that in the service of the King. I go to her to-night, to give orders for to-morrow. Then I must go to Royan, to see that the yacht is ready for us to quit France.

"To-morrow will be a great day for Tante Servais, when she knows! To-morrow will be the great day of my own life, too. To-morrow! Will he understand? *Will he forgive?*" . . .

He dropped the writing, and sat thinking, with softening eyes. He had begun to understand a little. What was it Mrs. Kyrle had said? "Calmly hysterical?" The manuscript showed it. And then, the inherited pride—and the vow.

But she had gone on too fast, she must fill up gaps, her pen had said on the paper he lifted again. Her father put her to school at the Convent of the Ursulines, in the St. Germain Faubourg. "My Louise must learn to be a grande dame de France," he told her. But the Sisters were to leave her religion alone; because it was her mother's religion, he said.

The nuns objected to that. "She is a Thanneguy, you say, M'sieur? But the Thanneguys, always they were faithful children of the Church!" said the Mother of the Ursulines.

"Not the American Thanneguys, Ma'am. Methodist Episcopal, that's ours,—and don't you forget it! There've been plenty of Protestant nobles in France?"

"Alas, yes!" the Mother of the Ursulines said.

"Just you make my Lois a grande dame, Ma'am, and leave her religion alone, else I'll have to take her away and the twenty thousand francs a year; you understand?"

The rule of her Order was to respect the parental wish,

the Mother of the Ursulines meekly said. And thus the girl came to be companioned with daughters of the proudest families in France.

"My father, my poor father, our fellowship ended the day I entered the Convent school," the manuscript went on. "He broke down in the parlour, I saw him weep, almost for the first time, the day he said good-bye. He *must* go back to the States now and again, he thought—there was the pile to be looked after and made bigger—'for the Duchesse, my dear!' Besides, he had friends and pursuits over there—he could not relinquish them all."

Three times a year he came over, to live a month in Paris, and then the two made holiday and were happy together again. Each time at their first meal together he would lift his glass and drink to her. "More of a Duchesse than ever, my girl! When you're twenty-one we'll go to the King,—we certainly will."

He came to Paris in the May of her fifth year at the House of the Ursulines. He was proud of what the Mother told him of her, he said. "Grande dame at last my dear." His eyes shone wet with pride.

Then came the change.

"My father, my poor father! In October he did not come,—a cablegram instead; I was summoned to him—he was dying, he could only speak with his eyes, and my last word to him was a promise. I promised by my love as a child and my honour as a woman to do all that he had planned for me to do. I have done some of it, I have done the worst and hardest of it. "Do everything strong," he used to say. It was bad,—I did it strong,—I don't know, now, how I could! For the rest,—oh, father, my poor dead father, you absolve me from the rest, if you know!

"He had written a paper of instructions for me, it was filed with his will.

"*'Foy au Roy. My Louise must let nothing keep her from taking up her rank and doing the duties of it. She will not think of love and marriage until my wishes have been accomplished. She will be proud of her lineage, and act as a noble French lady should do. France is to be her country. Up in Canada, Province of Quebec, J. L. Barte and Z. Bedeau think proudly of France, they told me so, though Barte and Bedeau are only bourgeois names. My Louise ought to feel greater pride than that.'*

"*'Our minister said last Sunday night, if you march in a regiment and think the Stars and Stripes are just a piece of printed cotton goods with a yellow fringe to it, you won't go far on the march. But if you remember that Old Glory is the symbol of your country and your countrymen, then you'll go ahead far and light-footed, with a satisfied and patient soul. Foy au Roy, Louise. My daughter the Duchesse will know what to do.'*

"Alain, if you read this, you will see I could not disobey, and perhaps,—perhaps—you can a little forgive what I was compelled to do."

She was to return to France, the paper ordered. She was to present herself to Monsieur d'Haussonville and Monsignor d'Hulst, Royalist gentlemen who would help her to approach the King.

But they both were dead, she found, when she reached France again, and the best that she could do was to go to the King's agent in Paris, who at that time was M. Dufeuille. M. Dufeuille was kind to her, he took her to the King at Twickenham, she touched the royal hand and received the royal kiss. The King of the French was gentle to her. Loyalty and a spirit of passionate

service awoke in her to strengthen her father's command. "He *is* the King!" she wrote. She gave M. Dufeuille a hundred thousand dollars, towards the expenses of the Royalist propaganda, and a month later a letter came from her King, in the royal hand.

"*My dear Duchesse de Thanneguy*," the letter began: it was like a letter-patent, it acknowledged her in the title, and opened to her the door of every Royalist mansion in France. But it laid upon her a task and a command. She was to marry, the letter said; she was to marry in the French noblesse, and to marry one who would toil with her for the restoration of the Crown.

For a while she put that command aside—a mere postponement. She was happy and proud meantime, the title was hers, her father's wish had been realised, and she was busy with plans for the restoration of the château. She had begun it with three rooms to live in while the rest of the long work should go on.

"And then, Alain, something *terrible* happened; it undid all I had accomplished, it made me the slave of my vow again," the manuscript told.

The reader stirred impatiently. "What now, what now?"

The removal of M. Dufeuille had made M. Pierre Dulac the Pretender's principal agent in France. Lois disliked M. Dulac, and felt sure that the dislike was returned. She had offended him, she was "stupidly proud to him,—he is not really noble, and he is not nice." In revenge, he began to hint that she was not rightfully Duchesse at all. His whispers spread and reached her. She challenged him about it, and he justified himself by producing a paper,—“a terrible paper, Alain. I hate to have to hurt you with it, but I must, it is part of my story, it is some-

thing for my justification. But oh, what will you feel about it when you know !”

A copy of a document from the Royal archives was joined to the manuscript here. Alain de Thanneguy took it up and read :—

“ Copy conforming to the original, by Roget, Archivist to the King.

I

“ Certificate by M. le Marquis de la Tour du Pin.

“I, Jean Louis Augustin, Marquis de la Tour du Pin, Peer of France, Lieutenant-General, Chevalier of the Order of St. Louis, do, this twentieth day of December, Anno Domini 1814, declare and attest as followeth :—

“*First*, that M. le Comte de Thanneguy was part of the expedition which left Weymouth in England for the port of Granville in France, being commissioned to carry succours of arms, powder, and money to the defenders of the Crown in Vendée and Brittany. I was myself embarked in the same vessel, and under the same orders as M. le Comte.

“*Second*, that upon the defeat of our expedition, by treachery ashore and ships of the Rebels coming up from Saint Malo, our vessel returned to the port of Weymouth, the arms and money being still on board.

“*Third*, that the chest of money (containing gold coin to the value of 300,000 francs), which was entrusted to M. le Comte de Thanneguy, by Prince de Condé and Milord Pitt (through Wickham and Crawford, English agents against the Rebels for Milord Pitt), was by myself and M. le Comte de Thanneguy removed from our ship and brought ashore at Weymouth, to an inn.

“*Fourth*, that by consequence of M. le Comte declaring

that he would give up the expedition, I demanded that the chest of money should be entrusted to me, Marquis de la Tour du Pin.

"*Fifth*, that this he refused me, picking a quarrel with me thereby, and fighting with me in the inn, no seconds or witnesses being present, and, by an unfair coup, running me through and leaving me for dead, he conveying the money away to his own sole keeping and private use.

"*Sixth*, that upon my recovery I sought M. le Comte de Thanne-guy, and learned that he had spent much money in the purchase of a house and estate near Weymouth.

"*Seventh*, that upon my demand for restitution of the money or rendering of account, he was insolent, refusing to render or to fight with me, and causing his servants to eject me, in manner so unseemly that it brought me in compass of the English law for brawling and being of riotous behaviour in the streets, whereby I lay in jail for two weeks.

"*Wherefore*, rejoicing in the glorious Restoration of the Royal Line, and the defeat of the Corsican Usurper, I, Jean Louis Augustin, Marquis de la Tour du Pin, Peer of France, Lieutenant-General, Chevalier of the Order of St. Louis, do now loyally and humbly petition His Majesty King Louis the Eighteenth, that His Majesty may not summon to His Majesty's Court the said Alain Charles Marie de Thanne-guy, nor allow and permit to him the title of Duc, he being a traitor, a thief, and well-nigh a murderer of me, and having married an Englishwoman of poor degree, by whom he has issue, and now calling himself Tanger as an Englishman, all of which latter by an agent I have truly ascertained.

"*Given at Paris 20th December, 1814, and signed :*

"MARQUIS DE LA TOUR DU PIN."

II

"Certificate by MM. les Abbés Guillet and Chalis.

"We, the undersigned, being priests, do hereby certify the contents of the attestation by M. le Marquis de la Tour du Pin, concerning M. le Comte de Thanneguy, to be a true account, we having been long resident in England as exiles and having heard from MM. de la Prévalye et de Conrac a statement of the evil practices of M. le Comte de Thanneguy, who is now settled at Weymouth as an English subject.

"Given in presence of Pressaye, Intendant to M. le Marquis de la Tour du Pin, at London, 1814.

"JOSEPH GUILLET, Abbé.

"ARMAND CHALIS, Abbé.

"N.B.—Not to be summoned or received.

"LOUIS."

"My God!" His dream was upon him again, the flashing cinematograph of it was unrolling within his brain. He dashed the writing to the floor.

XXXVIII

At last.

“THE ship, the chest, Weymouth Bay, the stab! it is just my dream!” . . .

Stonily he stood looking out into drear night. “I’m a Thanneguy—I *must* be. . . . Everything fits in,—and I’m descended from a cut-throat,—and a sneak,—and a thief!”

Restlessly he paced the room. “No wonder she hated to marry me,—no wonder she shied at a breed like mine!” He lifted a light to his face and stared into a mirror. Ah, that was why she had shrunk from him the wedding-day! His very face seemed to brand him,—the line of the nose, the turn of the lip. He himself could see the perfidy and inherited villainy there!

“Poor girl!” he muttered. Compunction had begun in him: fault did not rest in Lois alone. Up to the moment of the revelation he had thought himself mere butt and martyr. But now, “Some excuse for her, after all! . . . She can’t be measured by the common rule. . . .”

He took up the last sheets of her apologia. They were piteous reading. They told the bitterness that came upon her after the discovery of the certificates copied by the archivist to Louis XVIII.

Monsieur Dulac had taken his vengeance on her because

her pride had affronted his. "I found these copies in my father's collection, at our Château of Savernay, *Mademoiselle*," he said to her. There was affront in the way he said "*Mademoiselle*." It meant that she was no longer to be called *Duchesse*.

"*Foy au Roy*, you know," he went on sneeringly. "I hardly think the King can possibly recognise you now, *Mademoiselle*! How do we know that no heir by the right line exists,—somewhere in a slum or a prison in England?"

But she had become known as *Duchesse*,—how could she bear the degradation?—what was she to *do*? she cried to him anxiously.

"Do?" said he. "Faith, *I* don't know, *Mademoiselle*. Do what you like. Not my affair."

"But my father's wish? And the money I paid to the——"

"You won't have the countenance to ask that back, will you? My faith!—all the same if you do! It's spent. Besides, your grand-uncle, he robbed the King, you see! It is simply quits."

Almost she struck him, the manuscript confessed. She made him flinch before her anger. "Perhaps no heir exists," he said. "Better trace that out, *Mademoiselle*. If no direct heir exists, His Majesty might condescend to recognise you again."

"And if an heir *does* exist?" she demanded.

"My faith! marry him at once, *Mademoiselle*! Then you'll be *Duchesse* for certain! But he'll be English, and vulgar, probably. You'll have to polish him a bit" he sneered.

"What was I to do, Alain?" the words in the manuscript seemed to wail. "What else *could* I do? . . . I found you, I hated you for being the heir. But I married you,

and I *am* Duchesse de Thanneguy, my father's wish is fulfilled; at least I have kept my vow to *him*! But to you, to you?—Oh, I will give my rank up, I will be simple and ordinary, I will *kill* my pride . . . if you can forgive! . . .”

At Trouville the yachting English attorney, M. Goss, had been pointed out to her as something of a social curiosity. She made him her agent to discover Alain Tanger in England. She told him as little as was possible of the purpose of the search. But it was she who, by accident, saw the heir's name in the *Revue*. She hurried to England at once, leaving her maid behind her, and hiring in London the companionship of Mrs. Kyrle.

She met her cousin. She hated him for his mere existence. She wished him dead. Her strained and perverted feelings blinded her, she could not see him as he was. Then she loathed him for seeming so ready to marry her,—she thought that he must be Alain Charles Marie's true descendant, violent and mercenary and base. Then, he was so English, so perfectly English. “Rather a Republican!” he said, and once he jested at the Pretenders to the throne of France.

Foy au Roy? He could know nothing of such a sentiment, she was even afraid to mention the idea, she feared he might betray the King, as his ancestor had done.

And—“I am ashamed to write it, Alain!” she wrote, “but I thought it justifiable to be perfidious myself! I thought it would be a fair bargain, to take your name and give you twice the revenue. I was blind, I *hated* you, Alain,—I did not know the true Alain, I had not learned to respect you, and of course I did not love you then.

“I could not, *could* not bring myself to be really wife to you, Alain! Oh, I could not—how shall I write it?—I *could* not! I saw you as seldom as might be, and I fled

from you before you could claim my wifehood,—before night. . .

"Oh, think, Alain! Think, and you may forgive! How could I? How *can* a girl yield if she doesn't love? The thought of it was horrible, I . . ."

But here were words she had blotted out. He did not try to decipher them; he understood.

She went on to tell her remorse. Respect awoke in her when she learned that the forsaken refused to accept what he thought the price of ignominy. Remorse, respect, and then disappointment: for, after all, she had not gained her aim. Monsieur Pierre Dulac was still unsatisfied.

"I am perfectly Duchesse de Thanneguy now!" she told him proudly.

"Then where's the Duc?" he jeered. "Daren't you show him?"

"He will not join us!" she confessed.

"Ah, that will not please the King."

"Why not?"

"We can't recognise you if the Duc is disloyal, *Mrs. Tanger!*" the Royalist Agent-General said.

And then her pride flushed up, and took the guise of obstinate determination . . . Duchesse she *would* be, the misled King *should* recognise her. She offered money, but money would not suffice, M. Dulac told her. "It isn't your money only, it's influence we want, and you seem to have boggled that. You can't marry twice,—but bring us some other man. If you can't bring us the Duc, bring somebody more important!" he said. "There's Groschaud, for example: France has gone mad about this fellow Groschaud. If he were Loyalist, France would follow him, to the steps of the Throne! Oh yes, there's

your chance,—charm Groschaud, and gain him over. Be sweet to him, *Mrs. Tanger*, and then,—oh, you will know how to win Groschaud !”

Her husband clenched his fist as he read.

“Alain, it was my last chance, I undertook to try it—but oh, do not think that——” There were blotted words again. “I thought all would come right if I should fascinate M. Groschaud a little. The true bait was to be the prospect of power and a title and wealth. We knew that he was discontented with his treatment by the Government. We thought that he was ripe for change.

“But it would be dangerous work to win him over, M. Dulac told me; spies would be watching the famous man; I must not approach him without disguise. Then I remembered that I could sing, and I had heard that officers are fond of being friends with singing-girls—so that was why I went to the Café. M. Dulac arranged things at Brivac for me, through the Mother Superior of the Convent here. I came to Brivac as Blulette.

“And here I met you, and learned to love you, Alain! You saved me from the fire and the crush, and the gendarmes. And then you told me you loved Blulette.

“Oh, do not *altogether* cast me off, Alain, now! Do not, *do not*! Try to understand me a little,—help me to explain myself. I have been wicked, but help me and redeem me, Alain. Forgive me, and help me, and love me, Alain, for I love you now. When you read this we shall be together, in the house of our forefathers—husband and wife together, Alain,—and I love you and I have been true to you in one way,—I could wear your ring without shame, Alain,—you will believe *that*, won't you? And oh, if you can only forgive me a little, I will try by my love and my life to help you to forgive me all !”

He held that last appeal in his shaking clutch long after he had ceased to read. He sat trembling; his heart was arguing with his head; his gaze was fixed on the roses red amidst the creamy whiteness of the table. . . . Yes, she was as white as that . . . and her beauty was like that rose.

Pity and longing surged up together in his heart. "*Oh, do not altogether cast me off!*" The plea came to him again, almost to his ear; but it came in the voice of Blulette. Yet Lois was incomparably . . . Why, Blulette was as nothing compared to this beautiful strange being . . . his wife.

Again he paced the room, with slow, halting, unequal tread, as though the mental load of indecision weighted his steps. . . . "What to do, what to do? My God, what to do?" . . .

The candle-flame shivered as he opened a window: a gust of spray came in. It must be very late,—no lights in the village. The clock on the mantel answered him in one thin chime: it was half-past eleven.

"She's my wife, after all—and she's Blulette also—and I loved her—and she loves me,—and" . . .

He could step from the window and clamber down the rock.

Yet, "Half-past eleven and a rainy night," he muttered,—the cry of the watchmen at Thanneguy in the old times. A rainy night, and a rainy life before him, if he went away; the joy of pity, the delight of love,—Blulette,—Lois,—*Blulette!* if he . . ."

"I don't know—I can't decide!" he whispered to himself. "Goss will be abed by now. . . . It rains: it's dark!—I'm tired . . . I . . ."

He slammed the window to its casement, and with the slam the boudoir-door slipped open and stood an inch ajar.

His ear caught the sound of that: he shook as he stared at the open boudoir-door. *Had she opened it,—was she there?*

But no, she had left him. She would not wait, "*You have broken my hope,*" she had said, "*I think you have broken my heart!*" And yet,—that opened door? . . .

He faltered across the room of roses. He drew a long breath as he stood before that door ajar. His fingers fell tremblingly on the panel. Silence. He tapped again. No response. . . . Ah, no—she could not be there.

"I've been a fool again!" he muttered, "I've lost her, I've cast her away. She's gone . . . but I'll be sure!"

He drew a quick breath of resolve, he pulled at the door, he entered: the boudoir-room was dark.

Behind him the door fell-to, and he stood in the darkness panting. He was angry now,—angry with disappointment. Yes, she was gone: he remembered how the Tower-door had clanged. She would be housing with Tante Servais, she would be asleep on some wretched little peasant's bed at the lodge.

"I wouldn't have turned her out, . . . at the worst!" he muttered.

But the château was his, she would think: she would be too proud to stay. The pride, the strength, the almost mad devotion of the girl! Oh, what a book to read in, what a being and a nature to know! . . . A picture of her beauty shone in his mind suddenly. . . . And she was his—that splendid being,—to have and to hold!

Yet she was gone, he had let her go, she had quitted him again, and this time for ever! Lois! *Bluette!* . . . Ah, what a boor, what an idiot he had been! . . .

Then suddenly the freezing thrill of fear, herald of the supernatural, came on him. What, he was alone,—alone in that dread ruin! At night! Even Tante Servais was

away. . . . Nay, *was* he alone? The spirits of his evil old forbears, they would be hissing and mowing all around him, mowing the lip at him for a fool! If he could see them, — *and in a moment he might!*

His flesh crept at a sudden fancied sound; in an agony of fear he turned to flee. Yet something took his eye that instant, something that checked his flight.

His eye, habituate now to the darkness of the boudoir-room, perceived four broken thin lines of light. The four thin yellow lines met at four angles and almost shaped an oblong; they puzzled and scared him until he recognised that they outlined a shrunken panel of the inmost door. . . . Light, then, — light in the bedchamber of the Duchesse!

In an instant his fear was fled, but a new agitation was on him. Was she there, *was she there?* . . . His heart thumped, breath almost failed him. Light! in the bedchamber of his wife!

He groped towards the four thin yellow lines, that disappeared as he neared them. He stood before that inmost door, close to it, panting against it. His hands shook, all his body trembled, the door was trembling too. He tried to tap at the door, but his fingers slipped upon the panel without sound. He tried to tap again: a scratch on the wood alone replied. Louder he tapped: again from the wood the sole response.

Very slowly his fingers closed upon the knob; noiselessly he held it, for many seconds motionless. He feared to learn the truth.

She must have left a candle burning, when she quitted her bedchamber by the door into the corridor. The forecast of another disappointment angered him, he fumed at himself for his hesitation, and jerkily he turned the knob.

Silently the door moved inward, and a band of light

cut across the darkness of the boudoir. Within its irradiation he halted, wavering again: he checked his breath, so loud it sung in his strained ears. He took two steps forward, and, clutching and leaning on the yielding door, he stood within the bedchamber of his wife.

Two candles lit it, but they were burning low. His eyes turned from their pointed flames to the vast, low, sumptuous bed. Across the coverlet a dark blur lay; like a bend-sinister athwart the armorials embroidered there.

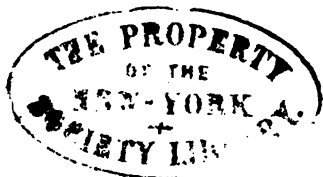
That dark blur was the prone form of his wife. Dead? *Was she dead?* He leaned towards her hurriedly.

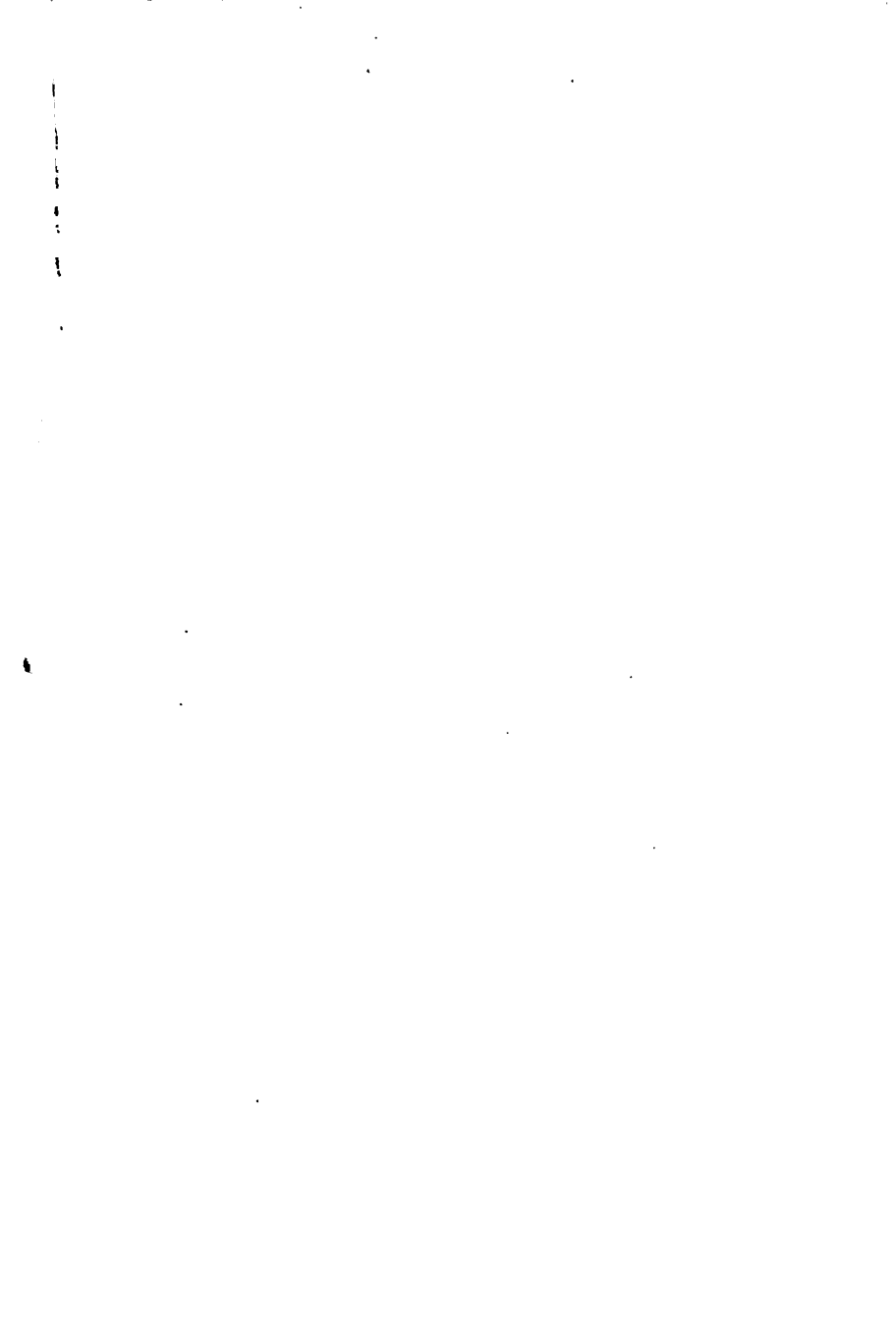
She lay where she had thrown herself to weep, two hours before. Motionless she lay, and a pang of anguish twisted and rent at his heart. . . . Yet no, she was not dead, — she breathed; he stood aloof, but he could see the white roundness of her breast lift and lapse in the rhythm of troubled slumber. Her pillow was tear-stained, her eyelashes were matted and wet, even while he gazed he heard a shuddering little moan. And at that piteous sound compassion caught him to her side.

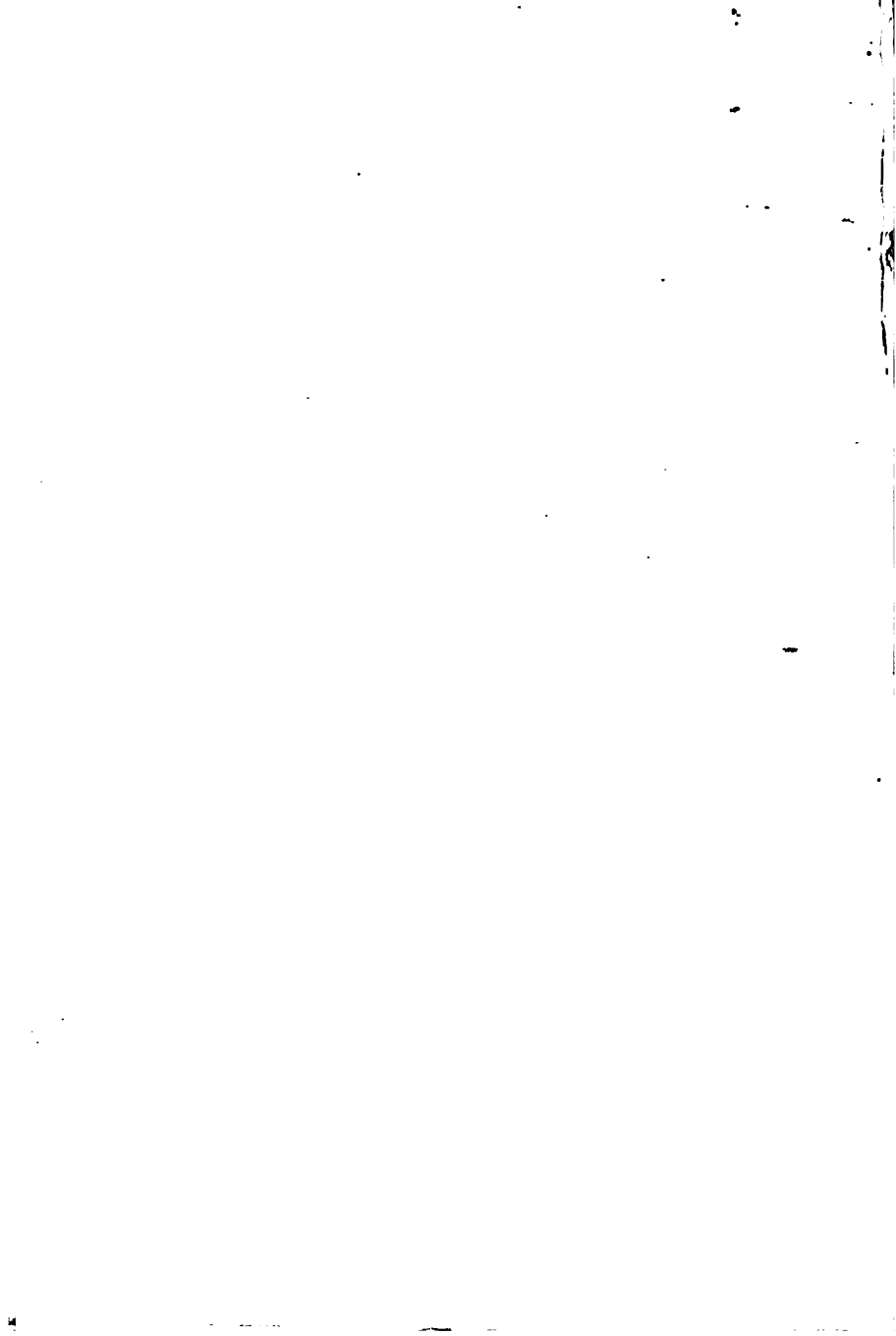
He was bent beside her now, he saw the thread of ribbon hang loose upon her throat, the ring was gone from it. His eyes shifted to the hand that lay, hapless and helpless, white flotsam in the darkness of her gown. Upon the marriage finger gleamed the ring.

A rush of tenderness filled his heart; he knelt and kissed the ring. And at that keen kiss, with a little shivering cry of fear and wonder and joy, Alain Tanger's wife awoke.

THE END.







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